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# Keddy

## A Story of Oxford

By  
H. N. Dickinson

Author of  
'Things that are Caesar's'



London  
William Heinemann  
1907



KD 11250



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TO  
CYRIL PEARSON,  
BALLIOL COLLEGE, 1900-1904.



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MR. CARPENTER	1
II. THE OXFORD MANNER	15
III. PRACTICAL RESEARCH	32
IV. ÆSTHETIC SENSIBILITIES	46
V. A LONE HAND	58
VI. THE WIDER VIEW	75
VII. APPEALS TO PHILIP SOBER	99
VIII. ISHMAEL	117
IX. CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR	138
X. A PYRRHIC VICTORY	152
XI. A PAWN IN THE GAME	165
XII. A PASSION FOR COMPLETENESS	184
XIII. THE DELUGE	208
XIV. ORCHARD WILTON	228
XV. FIAT JUSTITIA	240
XVI. FOR THOSE IN PERIL	261
XVII. THE BATTLE AND THE WOUNDS	269
XVIII. A CHARMED LIFE IN THE ROUT	292
XIX. THE AMAZING FACT	309
XX. AN ABSURD COMPARISON	320



## CHAPTER I

### MR. CARPENTER

THE clock struck a quarter past eight, the headmaster said the grace, and the sixty little schoolboys fired a volley of amens. They lifted the heads that had lolled, forehead on forearm, on the backs of the long desks, rose from kneeling on the dusty floor, and swarmed where rows of lockers lined the walls to put away the books that had burdened the hour of preparation and made even prayers an agreeable relief.

In the lives of small boys there is never a moment to lose. Jostling and elbowing they edged into single file by the table at the end of the big schoolroom to say good-night to Captain Forth, their spiritual and temporal lord. He it was whose well-spread table brewed their bustling animation, whose head planned the games that gave them breath, the lessons that passed their time, the rules that might possibly make them into citizens; and for none of these things were they grateful in the least. But he, fortunate man, could smile and chaff. For this they loved him. He stood by the table, sturdy, keen-eyed, with trim dark beard just touched with grey, and the warmth of his hand-shake was a thing to be prized, his indifference a sting. Even retirement does not make a sailor old, and Captain Forth at fifty-eight was as fresh as when his young wife's prayers and the importunity of love at forty had driven him to leave the service for Wynford Grange and the school speculation that had paid so well.

But it was a home as well as a school. Together with

a group of servants and under-masters, at the other end of the long room, were the Captain's family and guests. Family and guests habitually came to evening prayers, yet such a description is rather more baronial than this particular night would warrant. The family was only the Captain's eldest son, and the guests were only a middle-aged clergyman.

The boys were going out by the door near the head-master at the upper end. They came down the passage, passed the lower door, and crowded in the dining-hall for milk and biscuits before bed. One of the masters had the duty of supervising this last meal, and he stood by the door of the schoolroom stroking his chin. He was in a difficulty. His way to the dining-hall was blocked. Right in the doorway stood the guest of Captain Forth, and nerve was required of him who would pass an impediment like this. Are the clergy a laughing stock? Are they the fools of the families, the butt of lay contempt? In mercy to the young master's hesitation there must be exceptions granted. Short and stout and wondrously erect, the Captain's guest stood watching the file of boys, and the halo of authority circled his bald head. Authoritative he was, even when rigid as now, and even from behind. He had eyes that see round corners—the young master had noticed them—and in his port there was no yielding.

But the thing had to be done, and the young man braced himself. The clergyman quickly moved aside. 'Oh dear me, I beg your pardon,' he said, and immediately he lifted his glasses and watched the stream of schoolboys in the passage with the same brisk smile as before.

He stood against the passage wall in no one's way this time, in the place where Mrs. Forth would have stood to shake hands with the boys had she been at home. His plump face glittered in the brilliant interest of the scene; for not a boy went past but had a living soul within him to be saved or lost. His smile was fixed and unvarying. A godly face among the boys did not gladden it, a brutish face did not make it sad; only, as the file

went by, the interest of the spiritual physician grew keener and more keen at the sight of the work which might be done here. His slim companion, Captain Forth's son, leaned against the door-post and spoke from time to time, telling this and that, and smiling at those of the boys whom he knew. But the clergyman only answered his observations with quick nods. The scene was too absorbing, was passing too sadly fast.

In the dining-hall the boys asked: 'Who is Malcolm's clergyman?' The master on duty explained that he was an old school friend of Captain Forth's. 'He has a crucifix on his watch-chain. Is he a Roman Catholic, sir?' 'No,' the master said, and he added for his own amusement, 'Not quite.' Being only three years down from Oxford he had recognised this clergyman as one of the brethren of St. Saviour's House.

In the passage, when the last of the boys had passed, the subject of these comments turned to his companion. 'What schools are they going to?' he asked eagerly. 'How many to Eton, how many to Harrow, how many to Winchester?'

Malcolm Forth gave him the rough statistics. After each piece of information the clergyman made a noise like a low whistle.

'What a sight they make! What strange cases there must be among them, what interesting cases! If I were not myself, Malcolm, I should like to be your father. There could not be a more splendid work.'

'I'm sure I should like that arrangement as much as you,' said Malcolm, but the clergyman was too deeply moved to respond to this mild pleasantry.

So they stood silent as Captain Forth walked down the long passage towards them. And though they had almost everything in contrast, though one was full-bellied, short, and broad, the other straight and slim, though one was dark and the other fair, though one was glittering with excitement and the other, hands in pockets, was placidly amused, though the stamp of the world was on one and innocence beyond his years upon the other, yet there was a characteristic that they had in common.



Each looked out from eyes that saw life rich in colour, eyes keen to watch and quick to see.

Two young masters came out into the passage as Captain Forth joined them. 'Well, Carpenter, you like my boys?' said he to the visitor, and in his voice there was a trace of the Scottish accent that was not to be found in his southern bred sons. To the two masters he gave an invitation to the dining-room, where the drinking of wine had not been finished; and down the corridor and through the folding doors the five of them went into the private side of the house. Here, too, was prosperity. In the dining-room little but the spoons and forks and the great oak side-board was from the home in Scotland now abandoned. The rest was new, new at least to the man who had bought it. The room was large; an expanse of thick red carpet was between the table set for three and the walls where the Captain's sea-pictures hung. The fire of logs was almost more than the October evening called for. And in all of it, in the wine on the table, the water-colours on the walls, the cigars on the sideboard, the Chippendale chairs upon the polished borders, and the boy in the out-grown dinner-jacket, the soul of the Captain comprehensively rejoiced.

'Port for the parson,' he said, pushing the wine towards Mr. Carpenter. 'For the schoolmaster, what shall we say? Let us inaugurate this Madeira as the professional tippie. It is instructive geographically. And now'—when their glasses were filled—'we have a toast we mustn't forget. Malcolm! Malcolmo Oxoniensi!' For the Captain had an ironical liking for the little Latin-loving pedantries attributed to his class. The boy laughed in self-defence while they held their glasses and repeated the form of the toast. 'What should that be drunk in?' he asked, but was not answered. 'The four best years of your life begin to-morrow,' said the younger of the masters. Captain Forth intervened: 'Come now, don't bully the boy!' And so, from the beginning to the end of the first cigar, they talked of other things.

It was remarked by Malcolm that they were one too many for bridge. The suggestion made Mr. Carpenter

look up in annoyance. He disapproved, not of bridge, but of wasting precious time. Then the masters spoke of their work and Captain Forth said he had not written to his wife. A look of triumph came over the face of Mr. Carpenter.

‘My dear boy,’ he said to Malcolm, hurriedly and warmly, ‘then you and I will go and have a game of billiards. I must not let this afternoon’s beating go unreturned.’ Bridge would have wasted Mr. Carpenter’s time ; it will be seen that billiards did not.

Walking across the hall Malcolm found his arm held firmly at the elbow. Mr. Carpenter was quite the most demonstrative man he had ever met. For it was the off hand, so to speak, that gripped his arm, while the near hand patted his other shoulder. ‘Do you play billiards at St. Saviour’s House ?’ he asked.

Mr. Carpenter laughed heartily.

‘No, not exactly,’ he said, pinching the elbow vigorously. ‘I can assure you we find no time for that kind of thing. It’s as much as I can do to have my daily walk.’

The fact was that Mr. Carpenter played billiards so remarkably badly that Malcolm would have liked to know the reason why he played at all. It was not true, as Captain Forth said, that he engaged in recreations in order to be able to abstain from them in Lent. They were actually a serious part of his stock in trade.

He lost the game with the utmost good humour. Every unsuccessful stroke was followed by a genial observation and a rattle of not irrepressible laughter. ‘Well, there again ! This is shocking, shocking ! This is the last game I shall ever dare to play with you.’ The boy laughed politely, had little to say in reply, and was not guilty of the crime of cheating his own skill to keep his opponent in countenance.

At one end of the billiard-room the corner was cut off by a fifth wall, in which the fireplace was built. Here again were logs of Berkshire wood ablaze. These autumn evenings brought up the damp across the garden from the Thames, and Mrs. Forth was careful with colds and

coughs. And here were two armchairs, and there was no third person present.

'Now, dear old boy,' said Mr. Carpenter, putting down his cue, 'let us have a talk. What a comfortable chair! Indeed, what a glorious home you have altogether!'

Malcolm sat down in the other chair. 'Well,' he said, 'I've scarcely lived here at all, you know. Till I went abroad last spring I used to be at my Perthshire uncle's all through the terms, and in the holidays we nearly always went away.'

'That naughty heart of yours!' said the clergyman.

This exclamation was not so inconsequent as it might seem. The naughty heart was responsible for the fact that Malcolm had never been to school, and had therefore spent the term-time at the home of the Presbyterian uncle to whom he alluded. Mr. Carpenter gravely shook his head as he spoke the words. But they took the conversation one step nearer to the goal he meant it to reach.

'Oh, my heart's been all right for years,' the boy said quickly. 'The doctors would have let me go to school ages ago, only mother wouldn't hear of it till it was too late.'

So saying he advanced the talk another step in the right direction, and Mr. Carpenter looked more brisk and pleased than ever.

'It's a serious thing never to have been at school,' he said. 'H'm, yes. And have you met many schoolboys?'

His keen eyes darted straight at Malcolm's with the question. On the whole the answer pleased him; it cleared the ground. 'Hardly any,' he was told. 'Johnny and Duncan are quite small, you see.'

They were Malcolm's brothers.

'But, of course, there's always been Arthur Pollock,' the boy added, not without pride. 'He's at Oxford now, and I shall see a lot of him, I expect.'

'Pollock? Pollock?' said Mr. Carpenter. 'A Winchester name, I think.'

'No, he was at Eton. He used to be at school here when we were small boys. I've always known him.'

'At Eton? Pollock?' said Mr. Carpenter, painfully

puzzled. It was no more pleasant to him to be mistaken in these matters than it would be for a zoologist to find himself saying that lions came from Argentina. The most careless observer would have seen that he was simply racking his brains.

'Why, of course! Dear old boy, my memory must be going! Of course I remember Pollock; he's at your own college, Malcolm. I've heard him speak at the meetings of the Clavering, your college debating society, you know. Of course I remember him. He's tall—rather sad looking.'

But neither this joyous discovery nor the previous mystification had any reflection in the face of the boy, who watched with respectful attention, cool with the magnificent detachment of youth.

'So Pollock is a friend of yours. H'm.'

There was a pause. Pauses for reflection are necessary in conversations as difficult and important as this one. Suddenly came a sharp question.

'Does he stay here?'

'Oh yes. He has, often.'

'And he's the only boy you've known well?'

'Yes.'

The clergyman looked long into the comforting depths of the fire. His brow contracted with thought. He purred with meditation. Even after his vast experience the interest of a case like this consumed his soul; its awful problems almost broke his spirit. But he had that buoyancy which so often goes with corpulence, and in tones of meditative tenderness he spoke again.

'One escapes temptations,' he said, leaning forward and putting a caressing hand on the boy's knee. 'By not going to school one escapes temptations certainly. But then, dear old boy, one misses the armour of experience. It's a serious question.'

At eighteen it is not agreeable to the best of tempers to be told that one lacks experience. Malcolm took a cigarette from the box on the copper-topped table between them. He lit it with a bit of wood from the fire. It was the only protest he could make.

Mr. Carpenter waited till all was still again, and gravely, with hushed voice, he continued. He was very near his goal now.

‘Every freshman, even those who have been at schools, must find Oxford full of temptations, Malcolm. There are snares, there are pitfalls——’

‘Oh, I’ve been hearing all about that,’ said the boy.

‘Who from—who from?’ cried Mr. Carpenter, instantly alert again.

‘I was playing golf with one of our masters yesterday. He was talking to me.’

‘Who? Which one of them?’ asked the clergyman.

‘Harrington; the one who passed us in the passage.’

‘Oh, the short one with red hair?’

Mr. Carpenter felt that the short one with red hair was probably not a serious competitor. And here let it be stated once for all that the good man from St. Saviour’s House had not the least desire to capture Malcolm for that particular branch of Anglicanism that was his own. If he could only get him to take an intelligent interest in sin he cared little, for the present, from what sectional standpoint he regarded it.

‘And what was Mr. Harrington telling you?’

‘Oh, it may have been all nonsense, you know,’ the boy explained with some embarrassment. ‘He said there were a lot of men at Oxford I ought to avoid.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Mr. Carpenter eagerly.

‘Men who use scent and dress too well, and wear green ties and write poetry.’

‘I see, I see; the æsthetes. What did he tell you about them?’

‘He said they were a bad lot.’

‘Ah! And he warned you to avoid them?’

‘He said they would try and get hold of me because I don’t row or play football,’ said Malcolm, smiling off the seriousness of the subject. ‘I thought he was talking rather rot, you know. But he was awfully in earnest about it.’

Mr. Carpenter contracted his brow, gazing into the fire. ‘Yes, indeed, yes,’ he murmured.

'What harm did he say they would do you?' he added sharply. But he found this tiger-like crouching and springing to be not very effective with Malcolm, who paused and met his eye before he answered. That was his Scottish blood, perhaps, saving him from being rushed.

'He said they would sap my manhood,' he answered. Then Mr. Carpenter drew his chair nearer and put his hand on Malcolm's knee.

'Dear old boy,' he said, 'you and I know that there's something more important than your manhood. There's your soul. Let us think of that. Oxford is a place where men have lost their souls.'

'Have they?' said the boy, quite decently interested.

There is a tide in the affairs of clergymen.

'Malcolm dear'—and Mr. Carpenter leant forward, took the boy's hand in his, while his voice went low with emotion—'Malcolm dear, you don't know how glad I am to have this chance of warning you, helping you, dear old boy, before you plunge in among the perils. Of course I know what Mr. Harrington meant when he told you about those men at Oxford—I should think I did know, indeed, but I don't think, dear old boy, somehow I don't think you'll meet that kind of man just at first. Let us think what the real dangers will be. You're a friend of Pollock's, let's think about that. You'll meet his friends, Malcolm, the men who were with him at Eton, and others of the same kind, you know. I know so well how nice they are, how you'll like them, and enjoy the life they lead. They're men of your own class; that's it, isn't it? You'll feel at home among them, and that means so much. And they'll make you happy. Yes, we know that, don't we. But oh, dear old boy, we mustn't forget, we must never forget, there are dangers! If only you had seen the things I have seen in all that happy careless life at Oxford, if you only knew, dear old boy, what it means when the serious things are forgotten, when the graver side falls out of one's thoughts! Then the temptations come, and one is off one's guard, just for a moment, and then—the mischief is done before one

sees what is happening, Malcolm, and the misery and sorrow and suffering come upon one! Yes, I have seen it.'

'Oh, are Arthur's friends like that?' the boy asked, not without considerable interest. 'Are they—are they bad characters?'

Mr. Carpenter's plump face was moist in the awful difficulty of the moment. He pressed his lips together, and from the logs in the fire his straining eyes sought inspiration. A weaker man might have quoted a text and had done with it.

'Not bad characters, no, dear me, no. No, you'll find those men are the pleasantest and best and kindest of all Oxford. And they're gentlemen, dear old boy, and they've been at good schools. But oh, Malcolm, the very happiness of their life is a peril. It's care, Malcolm, care that we must use. It is simply impossible to be too careful, impossible. The life is so sweet, and yet so full of dangers. You must ask to be helped, dear old boy. Prayer! Oh, what a help it is. And however much we may love our friends, Pollock or the others, we mustn't forget to be always on our guard; yes, Malcolm dear, always to be sure that they are quite quite safe, sure that some hidden danger isn't lurking among them. If you'd seen what I have!'

But the fact was that Malcolm had not seen what Mr. Carpenter had. That accounted for the rather barren pause that followed, while Mr. Carpenter shook his head at the awful reminiscences.

'And so,' said the boy slowly, looking at the clergyman with his long straight gaze—'so I'm to be on my guard against Arthur.'

Mr. Carpenter released his hand, which retired at once into the appropriate pocket of his trousers.

'Well, well, don't let's put it quite as strongly as that, Malcolm dear.'

'Still, I'm to be on the look-out,' Malcolm repeated.

'Dear old boy, I'm quite sure Arthur Pollock is a thoroughly, thoroughly good man; I'm sure of it, and I'm very glad indeed you have such a friend. But one can

never be too careful. That's the point, isn't it. Dear me, it sounds ridiculous to say so ; but how true it is ! The happy days—the temptations—the careless moment—and——' With a gesture almost jocular Mr. Carpenter spread out his hands to indicate that after the careless moment all was up.

'I see,' said the boy very thoughtfully.

He might not have been to school, he might not have met many men of his own generation, but at least he had read the books that tell of their doings and formulate their peccadilloes. He had heard of the bottle of wine on the table, and the barmaid at the inn. Perhaps it had seemed all rather far away and unbelievable. It seemed real enough when the magic touch of Mr. Carpenter had waked it into life.

'One never knows, never, where the attack will come from,' said Mr. Carpenter earnestly. One meets some man, some man who seems safe enough, Malcolm, and one likes him, and before one knows what has happened one finds that that man was the danger—the thing that was evil. And then it may be too late.'

The boy sighed ruefully.

'It must need an awfully clever fellow to come through it all right.'

'Malcolm dear ! Not clever, not clever——' Mr. Carpenter began.

But the golden opportunity was cut short almost before it had begun. The door of the room burst open as if a spring had been released, and Captain Forth came in. The clergyman, all too soon, was checked. To Malcolm it was like the grip of a friendly hand in the dark, for this conversation, though interesting, though clearly important, had cast a gloom on the future and a strangeness round the present. He got up ; the alert look came back to his eyes, and he lit another cigarette. Mr. Carpenter spoke humorously of his terrible defeat at billiards. The Captain, with alarming rapidity, seized his son by the throat and threw him down into his chair, declaiming against the impudence of the rising generation. A breath of fresh air had blown across the room. The



Captain strode to the other end and poured out whisky-and-soda.

'Hi, boy, catch!' he cried, as he sent an envelope spinning across the billiard-table to Malcolm. 'Your mother sent you that in her letter to me. I ought to have given it to you this morning, but, damme, I forgot.'

Malcolm put the letter in his pocket. He supposed that the two old friends would like to be alone together, and so, before long, he left the room to go to bed.

The art of enjoyment had descended from father to son. Because, in the hall, the great mastiff rose from his place by the fire to greet him, because the softness of the leather sofa invited him, because he was cheered by the blaze, soothed by the loneliness he knew so well, he sat down, propped his back with cushions, crossed his legs, and called the beast to talk to him. Two great legs came on to the sofa beside him. The solemn eyes stared at his face. And he talked grave nonsense at the dog till the pleasure ceased to please. The Oxford æsthetes might assail his manhood. Arthur Pollock might lead him to all the seven deadly sins, but no one had warned him against the old mastiff who would neither bite his hand nor harm his soul.

He remembered his mother's letter, and he read it by the light of the hanging lamp as slowly, step by step, he went up the wide oak staircase. The corridor above was dim. On the chest half way upstairs he sat to finish it, to read it again.

'MY DARLING,

'Nothing but grandmamma's illness would have prevented my being at home on your last night. I am hard worked, and have very little time for writing. But what I write comes from the bottom of my heart.

'I saw Sir Matthew Jones after your visit to him the other day. He told me positively that your heart is now as good as other people's, and we need only use care against any very severe strain. How grateful we ought to be on this last night! How grateful for everything, for all these happy years! But oh, my dearest, now

that the new life is beginning, let us think. God has given you bodily health, better than we could ever have hoped. And ought we not, in our gratefulness, to take special care of that other health, the soul's health, which is even more important! Dearest, do not think I do not trust you absolutely, for I do. But you are so young, and you have so little experience. You will find many things in Oxford that you never knew before. But oh, take the golden rule to Oxford with you, remember that evil communications corrupt good manners, and keep yourself from the thing that is evil. Of all the good things God has given to my boy there is nothing so precious as his purity.'

Then, for the first time in his life, when he reached his room, Malcolm took two candles to the mirror on the table and sat down to study his personal appearance. For never before had he felt so uncomfortably important, never had he heard so much spoken about himself. Two blue eyes looked first at one and then at the other of themselves, but their tenderness, their humour, their alertness, were not then to be seen in either of them. In fact the picture did not do him justice. Not exactly handsome, he was yet of an exceedingly pleasant appearance in daily life, and in the mirror there was none of it. By this, perhaps, he was misled. For when he had gazed long, had studied the broad low forehead, the short thick-growing hair, the small nose, the belt of faint freckles that lingered across its bridge and beneath the eyes, the line of the mouth, the small chin satisfactorily firm—when he had seen and registered these things he rose impatient and still puzzled. What he had not found was his manhood, his soul, and his purity. What and where were these?

Well, they must be somewhere. To doubt that would be as improper as to doubt the existence of his medulla oblongata, of which he knew the name, but not the whereabouts or nature. Moreover, the first was to be sapped, the second killed, the third lost, unless he took the most elaborate precautions and took them with success.

He had a sense of protection from the familiar stillness of the room. For one more night he was safe. There was no one creeping up behind his back. The devil was not hiding under his bed. And the very security of the present made thicker the gloom of the future.

It was not until he was in bed, and the damp rich air of night was blowing in upon his face, that he remembered the saving clause inserted by Mr. Carpenter in that prophecy of woe. The life would be dangerous, uncertain, with perils lurking in disguise ; but, said the man of experience, it would be sweet. The boy was eighteen. And would it be sweet ? Would it ?

## CHAPTER II

### THE OXFORD MANNER

‘THE college is going to the dogs.’

‘It wouldn’t have happened a couple of years ago.’

‘The effective consequence of ineffective bloodism!’

‘Yes, but that’s Colquhoun’s, not yours,’ said the fourth of the quartet, and thereby the credit of the observation was given to the chaplain of the college to whom it was due.

‘Colquhoun’s pretty sick about it. Well, they’ve fairly stamped themselves this time, that’s one thing. Good Lord, I should like to get the whole college in one room, and just get up and tell them what I think of them.’

They stood where they had met, by the triangular patch of seedy shrubs on the uninteresting gravel in the corner of the back quadrangle. And though the festive shouting from the windows of staircase number fifteen gave point to their snorts of reprobation, it was not this or any present fact that they condemned. The crime, the disgrace, was the paucity of men who had come to shout for the college at the match that afternoon.

‘After all, it must have been partly an accident,’ said one. ‘It doesn’t always happen like this.’

‘Anywhere else in Oxford it simply couldn’t have happened at all,’ said another. ‘It’s this blasted idea of everyone going his own way and letting the college go to the devil. We do the work, we make the reputation, and then these men strut about and take the credit—the bloods.’

‘We had a better way of managing these things at

school,' another agitator said. 'Here's Wilton, bea-utifully dressed. Good Lord, I'd give a lot to be able to give him an official licking for cutting this afternoon.'

The offender walked past them in evening dress, having dined somewhere out of college. The light from the lamp-post shone on his face, illuminating a rather insolent stare. He was on his way to the staircase whence came the shouting and singing.

'That's the man! That's the man who's going to buy the place next year. Our priceless Bobby!'

'He allows us to live. We ought to be grateful.'

What was the use of such a man, they asked; but the question was purely rhetorical. Seeing that all he did was to put his name down for an occasional game of football when he felt inclined, to go out riding twice a week, to send the garden roller down the steps of the gardener's shed three times a term, and to look pretty, it was obvious there was no use in him at all. He was of the great army of futility. He lived on the unearned increment. He was under the impression that the college was made for man and not man for the college, and the prevalence of this delusion was the theme of ten minutes' further discourse. But this was Oxford, not Paris, and after all, no revolution was to come of it. There was a clatter of footsteps on the stone stairs of number fifteen, whooping of excited voices echoing among its walls, and as the stage in a Shakespearean play is changed in an instant from an empty place to the scene of an entire city's passions, the quiet quadrangle quivered into wildest animation. The agitators ceased to be important even to themselves.

The Great Bear night by night looks over the roof of the hall and into the back quadrangle. He sees the meditative couples strolling the four sides of the grass plot, talking what is vitally important, sinking voices as they pass a stranger. He sees the groups, agitators, and others, the molecules of public opinion. He sees the mad gambols of nights like the present. He sees the making and the withering of friendships. And, last of all, perhaps, he sees some silent figures like embodied caution gliding

over roofs and walls with velvet touch. But the Great Bear only sees by night. He has never seen the little boys at public schools edging timidly close to the walls, nor in the streets more recently the godlike figures whom seven devils could never have tempted to an act that was not majestic. Those were sights of daylight and of boyhood. So were the mighty athletes striding back from football, the flannelled heroes towering in the crowd with the eyes of the season upon them. These things the Great Bear was happy never to have watched, for if he had known of them, if his long memory had held them, what would he have thought upon the present night when from the mouth of number fifteen, to the sound of alarms and excursions, the same figures broke out to the most crazy, inconsequent, infantile scene to be found in the northern hemisphere? For it was what might be envied by the angels wearied of their serenity, to be as wild as demons and as innocent as babes.

No theory of causation could stand the test of such a scene. There was neither how nor why nor whither nor whence. There was no meaning in the cries that sounded, no explanation of the piano that stood in the corner by the hall, or of how it ever got there. First they danced to the buoyant ripple of the boating song, and when that magically changed to the gasps of the Hallelujah chorus they danced still. There was no theory in the choice of partners or their interchange. Here a collision was unheeded, there it called forth most eloquent apologies. But dancing ceased and groups formed. The arm to take was the arm that was nearest, the man to address was the first who was free to hear. One threw a stone and smashed a lamp, not because it was a lamp, but because it was there. Another hid himself behind a tree, elaborately careful, though no one looked for him or thought of his existence. Solemn as the servants of a king four men proceeded slowly, earnest purpose written on their faces, carrying cans of water. The cry of 'Cascade!' brought a group round the steps of the hall. From far away it was heard by those who were chasing the man who had dined out of college, whose white shirt

showed in the darkness, an irresistible object of pursuit. Joining hands they ran the length of the quadrangle, fell on the necks of the first men handy to support their exhausted frames, ran off again when the cry for more cans of water set up a public duty. The zealots who rebuilt Jerusalem worked not more strenuously than these. At last the water, with cans and enthusiasm, descended the steps of the hall, and it became a self-evident fact that the cascade had been a good one. The cans lay still till morning where they fell. A spirit-stirring noise was booming half way down the path, a poker drumming on a bath. Causeless, purposeless, it became part of the accepted order. There was a rush towards the two men who marched along with it. There were yells and screeches. The bath was a drum; it was a toboggan on the wet steps of the hall; it was an extinguisher placed over one who had temporarily succumbed; it was solemnly carried up a ladder and dropped down into the neighbouring college.

There stood two men in the doorway of a staircase, and as their first term was but four weeks old they were freshmen in many senses.

'Think of their people, do think of their people,' said one in tones of deliberate astonishment. 'Do imagine what they'd say if they could see them now.'

'Keep yourself from the thing that is evil;' the words rushed into the mind of the other. But the memory was lost in the glare of interest that his sparkling eyes let in.

'I have it, I have it,' he said. 'It's like "Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle."' The fellow who wrote that must have seen this kind of thing. It's just as mad.'

He was delighted with the ingenuity of the comparison, and would have liked at least a laugh in answer. He did not get it.

'How can they be such children!' exclaimed freshman number one.

'Yes, they've got the knack of it, haven't they,' said his friend, meeting scorn with admiration. The sheer inconsequence of it all had dazzled him.

'I'm going back to my room. Come across with me,' said the critic. 'It's disgusting.'

They walked down the path towards the front quadrangle. Four of the childish ones accosted them, and among them was the wearer of the white shirt, now comparatively black.

'Mr. Forth and Mr. Collins!' sang out one of these. 'Let me have the pleasure of introducing you to my friends.'

They stopped. To the freshmen these men were names or less. Collins took his companion's arm, and would have departed with him into safe seclusion. The inexperienced think on these occasions that sport is to be made of their inexperience. They do not realize that they are desired, not as green freshmen, but as human beings on the spot to be talked to and increase the bulk of life. Yet there happened to be present a spark of an alien spirit.

'Oh, you're the fellow with a bad heart,' said the tallest of the four, and there was contempt in his voice.

'Yes, would you like to hear it beating?' the accused answered.

'I know all about you. You've never been to school.'

'Otherwise he might have had the honour of your company at Peddleborough.'

The speaker of this retort was one who had the art of saying an unpleasant thing unpleasantly. It was he of the insolent stare, the useless life, and the soiled white shirt.

The leaping of discordant yells announced the onslaught of a tangled mass of humanity. Someone cried out, 'Bobby Whitebreast!' and 'Bobby Whitebreast' echoed and re-echoed on all notes, a kaleidoscopic babel, as they came. Their quarry had scarcely completed his unkind allusion to Peddleborough. He saw the coming peril. He started to run, and stopped. For in all this harlequinade, where the sole idea of everyone was his own immediate sensations, this Bobby Whitebreast kept a cool corner in his head. The gentleman from Peddleborough, however great an oarsman, had been taught his



place, and on the man who was not ashamed of a weak heart he would confer the one distinction in his power ; he would give him the chance of joining in the rag as an equal. He seized him by the arms from behind, and so met the attack with a human buffer instead of a dodging swift escape. Collins had gone, and the lamb was alone among wolves.

'Why, I swear, it's Keddy ! My old friend Keddy. You were lunching at the Grid with Pollock last Sunday.'

Malcolm Forth remembered the man well enough, and glowed at the sound of the long disused nickname.

'Who's Keddy ?' asked someone.

'Keddy is a most distinguished member of this college. This is Keddy. Keddy, let me introduce everyone. This is Mr. Robert Wilton with a dirty shirt. This is Mr. Tremayne, an eminent bruiser. This is——' And a string of names were solemnly pronounced, not without appropriate comments, not without opposition, while Malcolm stood rather shy and rather amused, and wholly pleased with the world and himself. These were great men, persons potent with oars and bats and balls, and some were the gilded drones, the parasitic bloods, whose existence had annoyed four agitators on the spot where they now stood. Even in the flush of the present, with a stranger hanging on each arm and speaking courteous nonsense in each ear, the musings of the past pricked Malcolm for an instant. Where were the fearful oaths, the leering eyes, the boorish obscenities, that had loomed before his novel-ridden mind as he walked in his Berkshire woods and thought of this side of Oxford life ? He had wondered whether they would spit about the ground.

'Keddy, what is the meaning of your very delightful name ?'

'Why, it doesn't want a meaning,' said the man who had done the introductions. 'Doesn't he look just like it ?'

'It's what we called him—oh, years and years ago,' said an old schoolfellow. 'How's the old Capt'n, Keddy ?'

'You see these fellows are not quite themselves,' ex-

plained the man on his right arm. 'I can't deny it ; but it's never going to happen again. This is positively the last time.'

'Then it's quite a great occasion,' said Malcolm.

'Quite a great occasion ; that's it exactly. It's quite a great occasion. Now may I presume on a short but charming acquaintance to ask you for a cigarette ?'

The crack of a great sjambok rang out like a pistol from across the quadrangle again and again.

'That ass Curly with his whip !' Malcolm held out a cigarette case, and the man took one. 'You're an invaluable fellow, Keddy,' he said as he carefully lit it. 'Come and see me one day. Don't forget. I mean it.'

Several men had run off in the direction of the cracking sjambok, yelling 'Curly !' in two well-separated syllables. Another lay on the ground moaning in dramatic terror. Another stretched out his arms like a sleepy child, and murmured 'Oh, damn !'

'Come on, Charley, let's go home,' he said, hanging the shoulder of a person wearing pince-nez. Malcolm thereby recognized two extremely senior men who were living out of college.

'Then what shall we do ? I'm bored,' said the sleeper on the rejection of his proposal.

'Let's have Curly's trousers.'

They started off on this enterprise, several of them, and the man with Malcolm's cigarette cried, 'Come on, Keddy !'

Nothing could have been a more brilliant success than the chase of Curly. He threw down his whip, and ran with the terror of a hare and the joy of a hound. Half way down the path he saw himself cut off, and fled into the staircase, Malcolm's staircase, which was nearest. And so, because it was the highest, Malcolm's bedroom was where he turned at bay. Malcolm, in the rear, saw the pursuers deluged with a jugfull of water as they reached the door. His sponges, chairs, bath, such clothing as lay about the room, were missiles. His delight suppressed all possible annoyance.

'Heaven help the fellow who lives up here ! Whose

room is it ?' said the man who would not go home. The fight was over, and the main body of combatants were going downstairs. Someone looked at the name above the door. 'Forth ! Who is Forth ?' 'Some unfortunate fresher !' 'Forth is Keddy ; here he is.' And nothing could have been more whole-hearted or light-hearted than the apologies the said Keddy received. It was such a nice room to fight in, they said. 'We will pay for all the damage,' said the man who had been sleepy. 'You'll have me up here apologizing again to-morrow.' Malcolm laughed and said he didn't mind, and said it with the added grace of truth. He went downstairs with them.

Yet again the inconsequent happened, and surely, Malcolm thought, it would go on happening for ever and ever from now. He was through the looking-glass, and never expected to return. Just as they reached the doorway at the bottom a terrified black cat shot in on its way to the cellars downstairs, and Curly, springing forward, bent and caught it. It might have been the new baby in the drawing-room. They stroked it, purred over it, exclaimed upon its charms, passed it like a precious thing from hand to hand. Yet it was an ill-favoured, irresponsible cat.

'Oh, what's its name ? Is it a lady or a gentleman ?'

'Turtle, its nose is just like yours.'

'Oh, it's half-witted. It's going to have a fit of palpitations.'

'No, no, it's only an attack of aggravated modesty. Give it to me.'

But no variety of tenderness produced anything like serenity in the cat. 'It's just discovering the fallacy of solipsism,' said the sleepy man. 'It thought we all had no objective existence, and now it finds we have.'

'Let's make it drunk,' said someone.

'We'll throw it into Porker Colquhoun's window,' Wilton suggested. 'Here, give it to me.'

He took it, regardless of the moving expostulations that rose on all sides. 'Oh, Bobby, how can you !' He walked towards the front quadrangle. They followed

him, telling him, some that he mustn't and some that he couldn't. He took no notice of them.

'Drop it, Bobby, there's a good chap,' said the man with pince-nez, catching him up.

'Let him have a shot. He'll never do it.'

'Charley, make him stop, you must.'

The chaplain, against whom this insult was directed, was not personally disliked. There was evident a certain disinclination to allow it. 'I hate him,' said Wilton, and then, mainly to make another chase, they ran at him to stop him. But he too ran, through the tunnel that joins the two quadrangles, across the triangular grass plots, up to within nine feet of the wall in which the window of the chaplain's lighted room stood open, and then no one had the heart to check him. He leant back and threw. A catherine-wheel of legs and tail whirled upwards; expectant faces followed its unerring path; it disappeared, and the echo of departing feet was all that remained in the front quadrangle.

Malcolm ran with them, nor did he stop to think whether it was his manhood, his soul, or his purity that crimes of this sort endangered. One of them it surely was. But the November night was very crisp, and the air had a sparkle, and Malcolm had caught a mood that was delicious beyond comparison. Particular things were blurred in the glare of fireworks through which he saw them. He could not tell which of the new companions was most charming, which of their mad acts intrinsically most delightful. What was to happen next?

A man with a clouded brow was standing near the shrubs in the back quadrangle. By every right he might have been among the maddest of the mad. But he had chosen isolation, and all about his thoughtful face there lay a mist of discontent. Then light broke through, and the man's spirit warmed.

'Hullo, Keddy! Is that you?' he said.

Truly the old nickname had come to life again to-night. It sounded very pleasant to the boy who had earned it years ago as the headmaster's small son, the kiddy who now and then would trot out in his smock blouse on to

the playing-field among the boys. 'They call me the keddy,' he had explained with pride, and so rechristened himself.

No one but Arthur Pollock had used the name for five years past. It was Arthur who used it now.

Keddy joined him, put his arm in his, and bounded yet higher into joy because to all else there was added the presence of his one old friend whose voice had rung the same affection long years back as now.

'Wilton has chucked a cat into Colquhoun's window,' he said in full flood of eagerness.

'What an ass he is,' said the friend. His cold tone was a disappointment.

'How did you get among all these men?' he asked.

Keddy laughed. 'The Lord knows,' he said. 'I just found myself among them. They've been up to my room fighting. They chased that man they call Curly up there. What's his real name?'

The friend of long standing saw that Keddy was on fire. He knew not whether to be pleased or jealous. He answered lightly the questions he was asked.

'They've turned your head,' he said, entirely kindly.

'But what the devil will Colquhoun do about the cat to-morrow?'

'Oh, he won't do anything. There won't be any row. The other dons don't much like him, you know. I'm going in, Keddy. You come along with me, and I'll give you a solemn lecture. It'll do you good.'

Keddy did not like being told that things would do him good. 'But the others?' he said.

'Never mind the others. They've all separated now.'

One silent stroke of his friend's will severed the link that kept him fastened to the now dispersing crowd of revellers, one pull at his arm took him along towards the other quadrangle.

'Tell me about Wilton,' he said as they walked. 'You know him quite well, don't you?'

'I've known him for years, more or less,' said Pollock. 'His grandfather lives near us in Somerset, and he's often there.'

‘What sort of a fellow is he?’

‘Oh, he’s all right.’

‘He’s awfully good-looking.’

‘Yes, he is that,’ said Pollock grudgingly. And then, his charity rebuking him, he said that Wilton was an excellent man, really a man he was fond of. He quoted, laughing :

‘Poor Henry Sin, from quite a child,  
I fear was just a trifle wild.’

‘What kind of wildness?’ Keddy asked him with quick interest.

‘Throwing cats into windows, my dear Keddy, that’s all. He was always in trouble at Eton. But there’s nothing really bad in him.’

A moment later, up three flights of spiral staircase, Keddy was in the room of his old friend, in the room of a social grandee of the college, where the walls had pictures of his own home, and in a group by the window there figured little Arthur Pollock and little Malcolm Forth, his heart still sound, in the football team at his father’s school. There, with excited eyes, he stood on the hearthrug while Pollock brought whisky from the cupboard, and Mr. Carpenter lay asleep in his bed at St. Saviour’s House. After the dazzling quad any room would have seemed a prison. It would take some minutes still to check the desire for Curly’s whip and Bobby Whitebreast’s shirt. But happy is the freshman and bright are his prospects who is taught that the mad Curly and the sober Pollock are parts of the same idea, the cans on the hall steps, the books on these shelves, the wild cries outside, the measured words in here! From the one to the other, in and out—that is Oxford—to know them not as chance flowers meeting in the same bundle, but as one and inseparable in their growth and their perfection like the scent and the colour of a rosebud.

‘I say, he can throw cats cleverly!’

‘Who?’

‘Why, Wilton.’

'My dear Keddy,' Pollock expostulated, 'Bobby Wilton is a very interesting creature, but to go on thinking about him all the way across the quad and up the stairs, and for three minutes on the hearthrug—is—well, it's carrying a special study too far.'

Pollock had a genius for knowing when things were being carried too far.

'Still, I did like seeing him throw that cat,' Keddy observed.

Very decorously Pollock smacked his head, and pushed him into one of the big red chairs by the fire. There was little more than a year between their ages, but between their stages of development, between the excited boy and the grave-faced Etonian, there was the full sweep of that great gulf of experience which Mr. Carpenter had tried to bridge by the warnings of an evening.

'Were people annoyed with him when he threw the cat?' Pollock asked.

'They stopped being annoyed when they saw he was really going to do it,' said Keddy, and he wondered why his friend laughed and looked at him so kindly.

'Well, that's the worst of Bobby. He always carries things to such extremes. To-night they probably think it's rather a fine thing to throw cats at Porker. To-morrow lots of them will wish it hadn't been done. Bobby will come a cropper one of these days. He'll knock up against one of the forces, against the force he belongs to himself.'

'The forces?' said Keddy, and after that he sucked at his pipe and said little. As he had moved in a dream of delight in the quad outside so he sat now in a dream of interest. He watched his old friend pace the room, watched his lean and nervous face drawn tight with the excitement of talk. He listened, followed, learned; he saw facts as ideas, ideas as facts, and the dry bones rose and walked before him. With what he heard that night it seemed that he could run the full circle of life. Wisdom was sucked dry.

Yet what was it? Bobby Wilton would knock up against one of the forces; that began it. By Keddy it

was remembered as the talk about the forces. Oxford is not a homogeneous whole, said Pollock. Nor is it an accidental concourse of isolated individuals. It is a meeting-place of forces and ideas. To-night, for instance, out in the quad, the social force had shown itself to Keddy. And had he been with Pollock a little earlier he might have heard four men standing there and cursing the bloods for being bloods. Pollock heard them as he passed, another force, in conflict with the first. Did Keddy know the name of Delville? Well, round Delville yet another force was gathered. These, too, conflicted with the social group of Curly Edwards and his friends. They were not like the agitators, mere intolerant athletes; they were men who fought society because they were not in it. All that society condemned they worshipped for that reason, and if you like to call them Delvillites the name was as good as any. And other forces there were, each with its points and prejudices, its disciples and its leaders, which Pollock set forth.

And thus, if you will throw cats at chaplain's windows, you will have the force of social respectability against you before long. So much for that. It passed from view, fell back, became a single illustrative point as Pollock talked and talked, and strode out further up the steep places of ideas. Motionless, silent, with his clear eyes sucking in the light, the boy sat listening. His pipe went out, his whisky stood forgotten on the floor beside him, a superfluous stimulant. There are stimulants more perilous than alcohol, as Mr. Carpenter could have told him. The linking of ideas is the beginning of intellectual life, and Keddy was linking ideas. In his blood was the heat of the wonderful life he had found in the quad, in his memory were the warnings of the past—Mr. Carpenter's, his mother's, Mr. Harrington's. And all of them made one idea too big to grasp.

He sprang to his feet and walked about like Pollock, only quicker.

'Arthur, look here, in all this stuff, all these forces, I mean, what's the force of sin?'

Pollock looked at him sharply.



'Now what are you worrying your head about? You've been talking to that man Carpenter.'

Keddy was not abashed by the accusation. He repeated his question. Where was sin? Was it a force by itself, or was it something mixed up with all the forces?

'What has Carpenter been talking to you about?' said Pollock severely. And after all, without bringing in Mr. Carpenter's name, the discussion could not go on at all. So out it came, all the long story of the evening at home, the vision of Oxford, the charming life, the pleasant men, the lurking dangers, the temptation, careless moment, and disaster. Excited still, still tingling with the evening's earlier joys, the boy put out the great inquiry with eagerness, with interest, with awe, alas! not wholly free from pleasure. 'Were the dangers lurking in all that to-night?'

'Keddy,' said his friend, picking up the glass of whisky from the floor, 'when you say you'll have a drink it's more usual to drink what you're given. And light that pipe again, and stop walking about the room, and look here, if I were you I shouldn't think too much of what Carpenter says. He's a crank, you know. And I shouldn't go to St. Saviour's House too often. It's not good for you. It's risking the loss of—well, the loss of your position, you know. It's dangerous.'

'Oh, Lord'—and Keddy's excitement cooled with astonishing rapidity—'is that another thing to be on my guard against?'

So rueful was his tone that Pollock laughed in his face. Pollock had varied through a curious course of expressions while Keddy had talked of Mr. Carpenter and the warnings. First he looked surprised, then disgusted, then a little anxious, and now he was amused.

'Was Carpenter talking rot, do you mean?' Keddy asked him.

'Rot, Keddy, rot.'

'But, damn it, it didn't sound like rot when he said it.'

'Well, my advice is, forget it.'

'He said I couldn't be too careful.'

Keddy saw that he had said something which jarred Pollock's nerves. So he quoted no more of Mr. Carpenter's remarks. But again the power of those grave warnings gripped him, and he saw as he had seen before a world where pitfalls lay before him, and dangers lurked on this side and on that. What if Mr. Carpenter himself were one of them. Then the darkness was but thicker. There was Curly Edwards with his sjambok, Tremayne who asked him for a cigarette, the men who fought in his room, the cans of water, the dancing, the noise. And if the truth be told, the thought of the hidden peril was illumined with a light that Keddy had not seen before—the sparkle of adventure.

'Go to bed,' Pollock said, putting his hands on Keddy's shoulders. 'It's half-past twelve. And don't puzzle your head with things you don't understand. I expect you'll find Sin waiting for you in the shadow in the passage, or hiding under your bed, or in your coal-scuttle. And come to luncheon here to-morrow. Curly will be here. I want you to get to know him. Go along, and forget every word Carpenter ever said to you. We'll keep your soul safe enough without any of that stuff.'

But Keddy was not clever at forgetting. Through the deserted quadrangles his journey to his own room was a slow one, and a rush of meditation marked each step. The night was black and dark and irresponsible now. But what had it been before? He had heard scholars quoting Latin over coffee after dinner. He had seen great heroes gambolling like puppies, had heard their voices hailing him as one of them, had been used by Wilton as a buffer in a fight, had listened spellbound to a philosopher launching ideas, and over the space of four long weeks there had sounded again the voices of Mr. Carpenter and his mother that cried out warning and foreshadowed the thing that was evil. It was easy enough for Pollock to smile and put it by. In the dark and silent quad it was another matter. Just as Mr. Carpenter had said, so had it been, the charming people, the careless hours, the happiness; and could Mr. Carpenter have been so right and yet so wrong? No, somewhere in the silent

college the thing unknown was waiting. Keddy knew it, felt it, and if there was any meaning in the quickening of his pulse, for the risk of the thing, he hoped it.

On the grass in the back quad, standing absolutely still by the side of the path ahead, there was a man. Keddy walked on, and saw that it was Wilton. He recognized him, through the darkness, though a tweed coat now concealed the white shirt-front. Wilton was of medium height. This and an extreme slimness, length of leg and shortness of body, were Keddy's indications. He wondered if Wilton would say good-night to him. He hoped so. The man was exciting, attractive, of great standing, and it was to him that Keddy owed his introduction to the rag that night. And the thought of Mr. Carpenter, the fear and joy of danger, were forgotten.

As he passed the motionless figure he heard a meditative voice say 'Keddy,' as though the speaker were giving himself a piece of not very important information. He turned towards him.

'I'm looking for someone to talk to me while I go to bed,' Wilton said. He seemed sad. 'But I'm afraid you won't do,' he added.

'Oh, that's a pity,' said Keddy. 'I hope you won't have to wait long.'

'Very long, I expect,' was the reply. 'A long, long time. Never mind, it can't be helped.'

Waiting is a thing that one can do as well as two, and it seemed to Keddy that there was no particular need, or indeed excuse, for him to wait. So he walked on.

Wilton came slowly after him. 'I think,' he said, as Keddy waited for him, 'we'd better decide that you will do; don't you think so?'

Keddy did think so, and what was it but another picture on the screen across which so much had passed that night? He delighted in the weight that was leant upon his shoulder as they went along. He lost not a particle of the flavour of the moment. To have been a wild character at school, to have been the central figure in the evening's revels, to have a daring and handsome face, were interesting things, things not likely to miss the

notice of a boy from a Perthshire manse when called on for companionship.

'You're an unprejudiced observer,' Wilton said to him as he pleased himself with these reflections. 'Do you call me drunk?'

'Oh no, why?' said Keddy. 'You're sleepy, that's all.'

'Some men become perfectly beastly,' Wilton observed.

'What, when they're drunk?'

'Yes. If you were to see one of the scouts as drunk as I am now you'd be disgusted.'

'That's rather hard on the scouts.'

'Yes, it is. Intoxication is revolting in everyone except a gentleman. Cheating at cards is revolting in everyone except a woman.' And a vast yawn prevented further observations on the subject.

His undressing, though spasmodic, was rapid. Clothed in pink flannel he was posing a syphon on a chair beside his bed when it dawned on Keddy's mind that the man was really drunk.

'You're quite sure I'm not disgusting?'

'Yes, quite sure.'

'That's right. I never want to be disgusting. And to-morrow I shall be quite right. I shall do a lot of work to-morrow.'

'Will you turn out the light,' he said from among the bedclothes. 'You've really made my going to bed quite interesting. Good-night.'

To Keddy, as he went away, it seemed that Heaven had sent a vision in answer to his questions. It would have been unreasonable to doubt that Wilton's dark head on the white pillow was the thing that was evil.

## CHAPTER III

### PRACTICAL RESEARCH

HAVING identified the thing that was evil by a chance so lucky as to seem providential, Keddy was surprised to find how little change in actual life was caused by the discovery. Knowledge, Mr. Carpenter had told him, is the great talisman for avoiding sin. But in the course of nature a talisman is very apt to sink to the level of a curiosity. All around and about the place where Keddy stood there was a garden blooming in the suns and rain of spring, new thoughts, new pleasures, new emotions, friends, and occupations, their colours more rich and varied than ever the brush of lonely anticipation had painted on the canvas of the future. Day after day from the night of the dancing in the quad their splendour and beauty crowded in upon his mind. It needed every drop of that prudent Scottish blood to keep the boy who had never been to school not virtuous so much as barely sane in the throes of a change so wildly enjoyable. He was experiencing a thing not necessarily so bad or contemptible as it is generally made out—a social success. First, he was Arthur Pollock's friend, for Arthur's sake allowed to linger in the marble halls of power. Then he was the freshman whom the mighty Curly Edwards was for ever teasing, ragging, and encouraging. And then he became himself, Keddy, the *ingenu*, the butt of one's humour and the mirror of one's youth, and on the dizzy heights of society he moved with sure feet. It was not wonderful in these days when the charm of novelty was changing to the charm of familiarity that Keddy's talisman should become a curiosity.

Yet sometimes he remembered it. The weeks wore on ; the first term ended, and the Easter term was well in progress, and on a fit occasion he told Arthur Pollock about it. While they played golf together at Hinksey it may have been, or as they walked by night in the quad or sat by the dying fire later than Keddy's healthy colour would have made one think possible, in one of the many talks that filled the blank places in the mind of the boy who had not been to school. All the story, conscientious and graphic, Keddy described. He told how the magnetic attraction of Oxford had first caught him on that November night in the quad, how Arthur's own talk had fired him, how the memory of Mr. Carpenter's warnings had stirred all manner of doubts and questions, and how dramatically Wilton's head on Wilton's pillow made the answer that he sought. And as he ended he laughed in embarrassment. 'It was awfully silly, you know. But it did seem interesting.'

'You like him, Keddy ?' said Pollock rather sadly, alluding to the personification of evil. 'I suppose you do. You like everyone.'

Keddy paused. Whether he liked or disliked Wilton did not seem to be to the point. But it had an interest of its own. 'I rather think I don't like him at all,' he said. 'He's too spiky. But I like watching him.'

He had to explain the reason why. 'He's so full,' he said, groping for a word. 'If I put my knuckle to his nose I'm sure sparks would come out. What is it ? And look here, if you go up to him when he's standing alone he looks as if he expected you to hit him, and rather wished you'd try. Why's that ? Why should he look like that when everyone likes him ?'

'He's only got rather a large allowance of the insolence of blood,' said Pollock. 'It's only insolence.'

'And if,' Keddy continued, eager with a new idea, 'if we all got typhoid the last man to die would be Bobby. That's it ; it's vitality. He's blown tight with vitality.'

After this conversation it pleased Pollock to allude to Wilton always as the 'Evil One.' It was worth his while, for Keddy never failed to blush and laugh and make

excuses for himself. However, when the Easter term was half way through its course, there happened what made the joke impossible. You do not find persons of Pollock's nice discrimination branding anyone as evil unless they are pretty sure that the accusation is meaningless to the point of absurdity. Pollock had a grave face and a heavy brow, but his touch on moral questions was lightness itself. When Wilton really did a thing that shocked and disgusted the college, when the 'Evil One' had become a phrase that people would have taken seriously and accepted, then by Pollock he could only be described as 'the unfortunate Bobby,' or 'the erring lamb.' The whole circumstance was so nauseating to Pollock's delicate taste that flippancy of treatment was the only alternative to total disregard of the subject. He would not discuss its moral aspect. Keddy, deeply interested, would attempt to wrest his views from him. 'You can't call it wicked,' he would say. 'Even Carpenter wouldn't call it exactly wicked. What was it?' And Pollock would shortly explain that the act was low. Low was the word for it. 'It is a thing that people of Bobby's class don't usually do, and that, my dear Keddy, is the last word on the subject.'

To Pollock it might be. Keddy could see what he called the 'burning sulphur look' on his friend's face, meaning that the smell of the topic was not to be endured. So he dropped it, unsatisfied, and resolved to carry the interesting case before another court. One of the many invitations from St. Saviour's House, pressing and business-like as ever, was a natural opportunity. It was about a week after Wilton's outrageous affair. The sensation was red-hot still, and in Keddy's ears there rang the indignation of Curly Edwards, Mr. Colquhoun, and many other assorted types of Oxford mind. Leaving behind him the prospect of a lively evening, Tremayne or someone having tempted him with the suggestion of after-dinner festivities, he went off to St. Saviour's House, and sat like a very good boy through the evening meal. This was the necessary prelude to his talk with Mr. Carpenter. He never much enjoyed these meals. To

have five or six exceptionally clerical clerics with an equal number of undergraduate guests all occupied for upwards of an hour in emphasizing the common-sense and mundane side of their minds, piteously striving after an almost unnatural worldliness, is an exhibition of versatility that one could do without. Keddy listened soberly while the table debated to and fro the leading topic of the evening. Is an imperial pint the same as an ordinary pint? With a zest and *abandon* worthy of a Publican's Association they discussed it, but Keddy was rather proud of Mr. Carpenter, who seemed somewhat out in the cold.

Alone with Mr. Carpenter in his little room after dinner he lost no time in getting to the question that interested him. In the course of a term Keddy's directness must have saved hours of Mr. Carpenter's valuable time. With him it was not necessary to use any of the ordinary preliminaries which go to make such talks artistically decent and complete. It was unnecessary for Mr. Carpenter to begin by discussing the weather, the rain, the effect on the crops, and thus to advance from bad crops to bad things in general with an incidental reference to bad souls as a starting-place for his excursion into the soul of the person in question. All was saved by Keddy's question: 'What do you think of this business about Wilton?'

Keddy had made himself exceedingly comfortable in one of the armchairs by the fire, and Mr. Carpenter was pacing to and fro in his cassock. But the result of this leading question was to bring the clergyman quickly to the other chair. When things became interesting Mr. Carpenter liked to be very near his interlocutor.

'Wilton? Wilton?' he said. 'I know the name.'

From the keenness of his expression one might judge that he knew more than the name. But Keddy was accustomed to that.

He did not, however, know much about the distressing incident that had agitated Keddy's college for the past week. With all the eagerness in the world he listened to the tale.

'You know Mr. Bramshaw?' Keddy began.



Mr. Carpenter smiled shrewdly and shook his head. The gesture was not one of negation, but was due to the fact that this Mr. Bramshaw, an ex-cabinet minister of no great eminence, was well known for free-thinking tendencies. It was a gesture of disapproval softened by the smile—really, in its way, quite perfect.

‘Well, you know Bramshaw makes all his money out of glue. And as he’s an old member of the college they asked him to come down and read a paper to the Clavering. It was something about the influence of public opinion.’

Mr. Carpenter nodded his head; he understood perfectly. He was all attention; he had been sometimes himself as a guest to the meetings of the Clavering society, which was, in Keddy’s college, rather a distinguished body.

‘And of course,’ said Keddy, ‘we’d all been making silly jokes about the glue, you know, and thinking what a lot of things we might do about it, gluing him in his chair, and all that sort of thing. Of course, nobody meant anything serious, but it was amusing to talk about, you know.’

Keddy had a luxurious way of telling his stories as of doing most things, and Mr. Carpenter nodded with growing impatience.

‘So Wilton took it seriously, and played some practical joke?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ said Keddy, and then Mr. Carpenter had heard enough. To the rest of the story he hardly listened. He listened no more than Nelson, planning for Trafalgar, would have listened to gossip about Napoleon’s childhood.

‘The meeting,’ Keddy continued, ‘was in the Junior Common Room, and Bramshaw hung up his coat and hat on a peg on the wall outside. His paper was awfully dull. The Master went out when he had done it, and we had a debate. Bramshaw was rather a nice little man, not quite a gentleman, but awfully modest and pleasant, and after the debate he stayed in the room and talked, and then he went out, and we went after him, and at the top of the stairs he stopped to take down his coat and hat, and——’

'It was glued to the wall, of course,' said Mr. Carpenter, hoping to cut matters short.

'Yes,' said Keddy, whom the recollection moved to a mixture of horror and amusement, 'it was simply fearful. Just think! The guest of the college! Staying with the Master! Nobody knew what to do, and Bramshaw was furious, and they had to tear the coat down. All the way across to the Master's house there was a crackle of apologies going off like royal salutes. And it wasn't any good; Bramshaw was raging like anything. And afterwards in Arthur Pollock's room we were all talking about it, and wondering who had done it, Edwards and Tremayne and Arthur and all of us——'

All of us! Us! Mr. Carpenter noted the words as he sat planning the direction of his broadside.

'And Wilton came in and told us he had done it himself, with some man from out of college. They were simply furious with him, and he was awfully angry with them. Nobody has talked about anything else ever since. What do you think about it?'

Mr. Carpenter sucked in his breath. His time had come. But his book of tactics told of other methods besides the frontal attack of moral reprobation.

'Well, Malcolm, it's hardly what the Romans would call a mortal sin.'

'Arthur calls it low,' Keddy remarked. 'That's all he'll say about it.'

'And you, what do you call it?'

Keddy acknowledged that of course it was a beastly thing to do.

'Dear old boy'—Mr. Carpenter leant forward and put his hand on Keddy's knee—'let's think of it, let's look at it in rather another way just for a bit. These wild pranks that people play, of course, we mustn't think too seriously of them, must we, or mix them up with graver things. But, Malcolm, how much they teach us! One day it's just a practical joke like this, just careless folly, and another day the same carelessness, before one knows what has happened, lands one in something far more—far more serious, dear old Malcolm. It's the careless life,

that's it, isn't it. Dear me! Dear me! How well I know what it means. It's so sad!

In a way, of course, it flatters any man to see that his words hold attention. But when Keddy shifted himself deeper in his chair, threw away his cigarette, and fixed his gaze on Mr. Carpenter, his body lax and his mind taut with the luxury of sheer interest, Mr. Carpenter foresaw for himself a sleepless night. Keddy's attitude suggested anything but the confessional.

'Dear old boy,' he said, his brow contracted with the strain of the crisis, 'if only I could make you see the terribly important meaning of all this. You remember that long talk we had at your home on the night before you first came up?'

Indeed, Keddy did remember. Of that he assured Mr. Carpenter most earnestly.

'And it's just when I think of all that that Wilton interests me so much. You've never met him, have you?'

Mr. Carpenter had not.

'Well, I wish you had.'

'I suppose, Malcolm dear, I suppose he's one of the men who go about with Pollock and Edwards?'

Keddy explained in suitable terms that Wilton was a pillar of society. But since the row, he said, the others had been furious with him.

'And they are your friends, Malcolm? You see more of them than of anyone?'

'They've been awfully good to me,' said Keddy.

He looked out of the open window to where the leafless trees were rustling in the wind. There were many things he would have liked to say. Mr. Carpenter, who sometimes found the inspiration of the spirit came rather slowly where Keddy was concerned, was struggling for expression, but Keddy's serious voice struck in.

'Wilton is—different,' he said.

Mr. Carpenter looked up sharply.

'I don't really like him,' Keddy went on. 'But there's something about him. Arthur calls it insolence, and I call it vitality. It interests me. Of course he does

horrid things. He did the glue business, of course, and last summer he drove a sheep into chapel.'

Mr. Carpenter said nothing.

'It was market-day or something,' Keddy continued dreamily, still with his eyes upon the waving trees, 'and the sheep got into the quad while morning chapel was going on. Of course all that is stupid of him, like the glue. I do wish he didn't do things like that. Arthur says if he isn't careful he'll get into trouble with the other fellows one of these days. They won't stand it. But still, he is interesting. He's like a thoroughbred, you know. He looks as if he'd go on till he dropped, though I don't know what he'd go on at. And he's got such a splendid face, and yet I don't like him. He makes me uncomfortable. Oh, I tell you what it is; I've got it now. I don't like him at ordinary times, but if I had to go out on a dark night on a road where there were tramps and garroters and that sort of thing, he's the man I should like to have with me.'

Keddy stopped. Nothing ever pleased him better than hitting on the exact expression that made his difficult thoughts intelligible. He gazed through the window at the night. It was clear that he saw the dark road, the tramps, and Wilton. Mr. Carpenter watched him, and was sure of it.

'Malcolm dear !'

Keddy awoke, and laughed.

'Malcolm dear, will you mind my saying it? Do you know, I think, if I were you, just at present, I shouldn't think too much about Wilton.'

'Oh,' said Keddy. It was a long, satisfied exclamation of appreciative interest. He had obtained Mr. Carpenter's opinion on the question of the hour.

But what did Mr. Carpenter mean? Not, of course, naturally not, certainly not, that Keddy should avoid Wilton entirely. That would be absurd. It was only care and moderation that were wanted. That was all. Let him only remember the dangers of such society, the obvious dangers, and be always on his guard.

But Keddy did not like Mr. Carpenter's moderation. He liked a definite decision.

‘Mr. Carpenter, you used to say there were dangers lurking where I least expected them. Do you think Wilton is one of them?’

The clergyman laughed heartily.

‘Dear old boy, how you jump to extremes! Why, I don’t even know Wilton! How can I say?’

‘But if I find he is really bad?’ Keddy asked.

‘But, Malcolm dear, I hope you won’t.’

‘But if I do?’ Keddy meant to have an answer. He had not told Mr. Carpenter about the dark head on the white pillow last November, but he meant to have an opinion which would meet that case.

‘Then, perhaps,’ said Mr. Carpenter gravely, ‘perhaps, dear old boy, in that case it would be best to see very little of him, very little indeed.’

There it was, the old story, the old principle of life that stirred Keddy’s blood to excitement. Had not Arthur scolded him for going about with a man called Robinson who had a cockney accent and came from Balham? Had not Mr. Carpenter for ever and ever been hovering round this point of avoidance? Had not his mother used it too? And Arthur had told him to avoid Mr. Carpenter, while Mr. Carpenter practically said he should avoid Arthur. The Perthshire uncle told him to avoid dangerous books; in Oxford it was not books but men. Was Keddy going to revolt? He could not look in Mr. Carpenter’s face and think that. He could not hear the affectionate farewell, feel the grip of the clergyman’s arm as they stood at the door of St. Saviour’s House and said good-night, and tell himself those solemn warnings were to be ignored. He knew himself. Putting aside such nonsense as the idea of avoiding Arthur or avoiding Mr. Carpenter, he knew that the thing itself, the thing which was evil, was in a place where he could not linger. But as visions rushed upon him, as fancy linked with curiosity and blew like the February wind against his face, he resolved that before he deserted the evil thing he would look at it and learn for himself the manner and the meaning of its ways.

He was walking back to college. At St. Saviour’s

House, his talk with Mr. Carpenter just ended, he had been to compline in their chapel, had heard those warm and kindly words of parting at the door. And now the stars were above him. His freedom was in his hands, the gleaming freedom of Oxford. And yet he would be careful. His blood was warm with that which makes a colt lie down and roll his pleasurable back upon the grass. He sucked the air—the chapel had been hot—and each limb of his body was a possession to be enjoyed. Yet he would be prudent. Not if he knew it would he lose the trust of Mr. Carpenter and the confidence of his people at home. Down St. Giles's he walked, and the pleasure of solitude led him off into Beaumont Street to set a walk of half a mile between himself and his own college. He was going to be careful. When he met the Evil Thing he would be careful; he would watch it, understand it, learn it, but it should not touch him. It might be interesting, but it should not touch him. There should never come a day when he could not look Mr. Carpenter in the face. And the wind was fresh and cold; Keddy felt his skin enjoying it. They said he was delicate, but he was not such a fool as to believe that.

He was at the college door waiting for admittance, and the draught of solitude had been sweet to the last drop. He did not want another just yet. He wanted—was it Arthur Pollock?—probably it was. He wanted someone who would talk about Carpenter and Wilton, and sin and contamination, and surely that was Arthur. Nobody talked like Arthur once you got him to start. And yet in the porch he hesitated. There was Arthur's staircase on his right, on his left was the way to the back quad. Had he the cheek to do it? Suppose he found the room full of third year bloods! Yet the inclination was strong, for there was something that would suit his mood better even than the best of talk. It is thrilling to hear ghost stories in a darkened room, but to sit in the churchyard thrills one still more. It was interesting to talk of sin and danger; but the old suspicion, the absurd old feeling of last term, absurd no longer, marked out Bobby Wilton as the crown of the night's sensations. Though

he hardly knew him, Keddy would try his luck and visit him.

Wilton's room was at the other end of the back quad and against the hall, quite a long walk, which Keddy might have occupied by thinking what he would do if the room were full of men. However, he generally left these crises to settle themselves ; it is the best plan for people who can smile as Keddy could. And indeed it was not likely he would find a crowd, for Wilton, since the affair of the glue, had been decidedly in disgrace.

The broken lamp in the quadrangle was evidence of a noisy evening. There was a light in Wilton's window, which was satisfactory. The staircase was dark. Someone had turned out the light in the passage. There was a cupboard-door to knock against, cans to stumble over, some great pieces of coal. Really Keddy was making as much noise as four drunk men.

He knocked at the door, went in without waiting for an answer, and felt as if someone had met him with a douche of cold water. Involuntarily he exclaimed 'Oh !' He stood still where he was. He struggled to realize. He realized, and one wave of torturing embarrassment burst upon him. He would have given all he possessed to escape from the place, and have it as though he had never been within it.

The whole room was in wild disorder ; they had wrecked it ; chairs were lying broken, tables overturned, trampled cushions thrown about, pictures swept off shelves and mantelpiece, flowers, ornaments, lumps of coal, upon the floor, and water soaking everywhere. The windows were broken. Books were pulled from the shelves. It was a scene of destruction. Had it also been a scene of battle ?

Slowly, in bewilderment, Keddy turned his eyes towards the fireplace, and Wilton, who stood there, let drop a poker from his hand into the fender. Wilton was in his shirt-sleeves, torn, dishevelled, dirty, soaking wet, and Keddy knew that there had been a battle. But against him the ready poker was not raised ; there was no violence done him except by Wilton's eyes.

'Oh, what beasts they are !' he said, 'what beasts they

are !' And then he remembered what he had come out into this wilderness to see. He had come to see the man who was labelled 'Danger,' the man who stood for the unknown possibilities of evil. How was evil to be treated ? Mr. Carpenter said it should be avoided ; others it seemed, used punishment. Keddy had no theory of punishment as yet, but at this moment he would have been glad enough could he take Mr. Carpenter's advice and escape from a place so fearful.

But this was shame, not pity or prudence. He strove to prepare a way of escape. 'I only came to ask you——' he began, and then his invention failed him and he stopped. It was a pleasant thing to admire Insolence lounging in the quad ; it might have been a fine thing to watch Insolence at bay ; it was something very different to see Insolence in the hour that came after. 'Oh, I'm so awfully sorry I came ; I'd never have come if I'd known about—this,' said Keddy.

'I see,' said Wilton, very frigid ; and Keddy wished he could explain what he meant. The disgrace of a strong man is sacred. Would anyone care to see a great general having a tooth pulled out ?

Keddy stooped to pick up a photograph frame that was lying near him as he waited by the door. There were several, and he put them on the ledge of the bookcase.

'Oh, don't trouble about those things,' said Wilton. 'Kemp will put it all right in the morning.'

So Keddy did no more tidying. He looked round the room, and could not help repeating, 'What beasts they are !'

'They were all drunk,' Wilton replied.

Keddy was acute enough to perceive that this was said without conviction. But he liked Wilton for saying it ; it lightened the air. Wilton had never looked more dangerous than now, and yet there was a change. He shrugged his shoulders, dropped into an armchair, and spoke in different tones. 'Have some whisky. There's some in that cupboard.'

To remain in this room was like standing on hot iron, but Keddy was impelled to find the whisky and mix himself a drink. Wilton did the same.



'Are you a particular friend of Tremayne's?'

'Oh, I know him,' said Keddy.

'I don't think he'll show again for a day or two. I must have pretty well smashed his face in. I landed that lump of coal full on his forehead.'

Keddy looked down at the piece of coal. 'Good Lord,' he said, 'did you really?'

'And I rather think I smashed Donaldson's wrist with the poker.'

'Donaldson's in the first togger,' said Keddy. 'That'll stop his rowing.'

He would have liked to know if Wilton himself had suffered any damage. But he could not ask, and when he dared to look he saw nothing but the dark hair ruffled, grime on the clear face, and something in the eyes that was left from the madness of the fight. But it was not his face, it was not the cold reserve of his manner, it was his wet, crumpled, dirtied collar wrenched open at the neck which drove off Keddy's eyes, and sent him back upon the full tide of his embarrassment. He gulped down a lot of the whisky which stood between him and a decent escape. Wilton lit a cigarette.

'I've been dining at St. Saviour's House,' said Keddy, who had to say something.

'Oh, are you going to be a parson?'

'No. I know Carpenter. He's one of the fellows there.'

Wilton remembered the man; he used to see him hanging about at Eton. 'He used to come down when some fellow had got into a mess, and wanted spiritual smelling-salts. I used to call him Dr. Sacheverell. I don't know why.'

Keddy laughed, and Wilton went on talking, though all the time he kept his eyes averted.

'I've never been inside St. Saviour's House,' he said.

'Don't you meet a lot of outsiders there?'

'They are rather funny,' said Keddy.

'I suppose Carpenter's all right,' Wilton observed; 'but some of those monk devils are fearful. I'd think twice before I trusted myself inside St. Saviour's House.'

I should keep thinking of thumbscrews and racks and swinging hammers and Edgar Allen Poe. Besides, you might find yourself damned before you knew where you were. You never know what tricks these priests are up to.'

Wilton might succeed in being humorous, but Keddy could not. He put down his glass for the last time. He was torn with doubt as to whether he could offer any help. Anything, any emotion from a smile to a tear, would have broken the barrier and opened the way for his natural kindness. But it did not come.

'I'm going to bed,' he said.

Wilton got up and struck a match. He laid on Keddy's shoulder the hand that had swung the coal and the poker, and done other injuries not yet recorded.

'I'll steer you through the outlying *débris*,' he said. He took him out into the passage. 'Good-night,' said Keddy at the end. With perfect indifference Wilton answered 'Good-night.'

Unable to visit Pollock, unable to face anyone, unable to think connectedly, Keddy went back to his room. He was nervous at his footfall in the stone passage. The cold night chilled him. The grey walls oppressed him. He had seen a thing which neither Mr. Carpenter nor Arthur nor books had shown him hitherto. He had seen a strong man punished and a proud man fighting shame. Beyond the region of warnings and philosophizing he had seen a great reality, and there was no more spirit left in him. Was Wilton the danger, the evil? Would Keddy examine him and discuss him, and spin theories in assurance that the danger should never touch him? Something had touched him to-night. The old problem of sin had taken a new light.

At last, in the proper Keddy way, he strung together the catchwords that belonged to Wilton. Insolence—vitality—spiky—typhoid fever. 'Yes,' he thought, 'he pulled himself together and behaved as well as anyone could. But damn it, that only made me feel more of a brute than ever.' When he had started to investigate the evil thing he had not expected to feel a brute.

## CHAPTER IV

### ÆSTHETIC SENSIBILITIES

THE Reverend Bernard Colquhoun stood six foot two in his thick woolly socks and rather higher in what he called his beetle-crushers, implements which seemed designed for the conduct of this cruel sport in workmen's cottages rather than in the preserves of a great college. Though fair and clean-shaven, he reminded one of the Village Blacksmith, and the muscles of his brawny arm were considered very taking by admirers. His appearance made plain black cloth look like the roughest tweed; his surplice was a suit of mail. In modern days it is surely hard to exaggerate the value of a man like this. For if anyone were found to say or hint or fear that Christianity is the religion of weaklings and cowards, Mr. Colquhoun would give a contrary argument that would not be soon forgotten. It would not be the first time that orthodoxy has resulted from muscular force.

On the question of Bobby Wilton's punishment he expressed himself in a spirit free from all personal prejudice; it was naturally the general topic on the day that followed. 'The finest thing the college has done in my time,' he called it, and it was to be inferred that anyone who differed might look for trouble. The little group of upturned faces accepted his pronouncement. 'It was the right thing done in the right way, and I wish to Heaven I could have had a hand in the job myself. I didn't think our precious bloods had it in them.'

'It was Edwards who made them do it,' said someone. 'I don't believe they wanted to really.'

'Curly's all right,' Mr. Colquhoun declared, throwing back his huge shoulders. 'I tell you chaps what it is. Last night's trick has done more to put the college on the right lines than anything that's happened for years.'

'He fought like a demon,' said another.

'Tremayne got a lump of coal in his face; he had to have his eye stitched up this morning.'

'It was Edwards who got him down.'

'He threw things at them even when they were leaving the room.'

'Quite right too,' said Mr. Colquhoun. 'Let him fight. We'll jolly well show him we can hit harder than he can.'

'And what's to happen to him now?' someone asked.

But the question was not answered.

Another, a devotee of religion, declared the story was all over the place. He had met Carpenter of St. Saviour's House, who said he thought it was hardly the method—

'Queer sort of fish, Carpenter,' said Mr. Colquhoun, and then he put his huge legs in motion while the group respectfully parted to give him way.

The college was enjoying a sensation, a thing dear to the mind of man. But the sacrifice of Wilton provided something more interesting than even this. For it raised one of the most enthralling moral issues. Was it right or was it wrong of Edwards and company to take the law so sternly into their own hands?

Here, near the porch, the discussion continued after Colquhoun had left.

A man called Robinson, who came from Pollock's staircase, was outpacing all others in the race for the moral ultimate. He inquired if the avengers had been moved by personal anger or by a dispassionate resolve to chastise the erring lamb. That was the moral problem in a nutshell. It raised a vision of the seven stalwarts gathered in Wilton's passage at eleven o'clock at night with their hands to their heads, and their feet stamping the ground, while they writhed in the throes of agonizing doubt as to the exact proportion in which their motives were mixed.

Keddy heard it, standing with the others, and it did not satisfy him at all. While Colquhoun had been holding forth he had joined this group on purpose to hear them comment on the event; but now he heard it he did not like it. It was not so bad while they were discussing Curly's moral position in the matter, but when they came to talk of Wilton himself it was horrid. For if, following Pollock's method, these men were to be classed as a 'force' in the life of the college, it would have been the force of insignificance. They were strange and unknown figures. They hailed from odd corners of the college, and one wondered what kind of homes and schools had produced them. They were dull, in Keddy's opinion, and they did not always understand what you said to them. Some of them he had known in the very earliest days, when all the college had been equally strange. Arthur Pollock, however, had soon forbidden him to go about with them. Only Robinson, the man who knew Mr. Carpenter, he persisted in befriending, because the man was lonely and clinging and played golf.

As a matter of fact this element in the college went by the name of 'Tathamites.' It was due to their connection with a remarkable person called Tatham who was one of Mr. Carpenter's men, and was to play a part hereafter in the affairs of Bobby Wilton. They were the unfortunates of life, the socially obscure, the harmless creatures on whom no one tramples except sometimes by mistake. The instinct of a person like Keddy was to behave extremely pleasantly when he met them, but not exactly to thrust himself upon them. That he should stand at the edge of their group, listening, watching, held by a horrid fascination, was quite extraordinary. But it was a direct consequence of the cataclysm of last night. Who would not stand and stare to hear the Tathamites patronizing, pitying, and even scorning Wilton?

The natural note of awe was not absent at the first.

'Just think of such a thing happening to a man who may be a baronet any day! Think of him being held down and having water poured over him.'

There was silence while this very proper sentiment sank

in. There was nothing for Keddy to quarrel with in this. But the tone changed.

‘It will do him all the good in the world,’ another man said jauntily. ‘It was just the sort of thing he wanted.’

Keddy detected a flutter of excitement. It seemed to him that they were all holding their heads a little higher than usual.

‘I know the kind of man he is,’ the same speaker continued. ‘I once sat next to him at a Dean’s dinner, and he’s not really so bad. All he wanted was a lesson. I shouldn’t wonder if he went to Curly Edwards one day and thanked him for it.’

‘Will he and Edwards make it up, d’you think?’ someone asked. Or, to put the question properly, to what extent was Wilton still to rank as a blood?

Keddy was beginning to experience a most unwonted depth of feeling against the Tathamites. Yet he stayed and listened.

‘He’ll look very different when he goes about the place now, I expect. I expect he’ll be glad of a word from anyone.’

‘He’ll stop looking at everyone as if they were black-beetles.’

Would any of them have dared to breathe those words yesterday? That was it, thought Keddy. That was what made his hands go hot in his pockets and his indignation boil in his head. But while he watched them, sulky and disgusted, a man among them turned and questioned him. He had to pull himself together. The little group seemed to realize his existence all at once. Had he been in last night’s adventure, they asked. Had he seen the fight?

Then, greedy as they were for the details, they were made to remember that though Keddy was a freshman he was something of a blood. He met the eyes of the questioner. He had not been there, he said, and the questioner had an unreasonable impulse to apologize for he knew not what. It was not much of a triumph for Keddy, however. He felt the colour coming to his face. He wished he had not agreed to play golf with Robinson

that afternoon. He wished he were miles away in the woods at home. He thought of the crumpled collar last night, and he was almost as much embarrassed before these men as he had been in Wilton's room. But worse was to follow.

'I say, look,' said someone in a whisper, 'here he comes!'

As if there had been an explosion in the quad, Keddy turned and saw Wilton walking past them down the path, quite close. Last night he had been held down and drenched with water, to-day the Tathamites, the insignificant, the obscure, the mean, were watching him with all their eyes. Explain it how you will, the thing was fearful.

'He's spruced himself up since last night,' someone remarked, and comments followed thick and fast.

'He doesn't look as if he had learned his lesson yet.'

'He's going to have lunch out of college. He'll be out of college a lot now, I expect.'

'He must have thought twice before he walked across the quad when there are so many people about.'

That was as much as Keddy could bear. He went back to his room. On the Tathamites he called down curses for their watching and their comments, and on himself, for he too had watched. He had not been able to help it. He knew what he had feared to see—truculence of bearing, an unnatural buoyancy, tricks like blowing one's nose or looking at one's watch, or even a shamefaced shrinking. Instead of those there had been just Wilton as before, graceful, quiet, slightly insolent, his bearing not changed by so much as the suggestion of a tint. How did he manage it? It was vitality, doubtless, but what was the value of a word like that? The conduct of the Tathamites had not been very flagrantly improper. But somehow, for an instant, it seemed to Keddy's puzzled mind that he had stepped suddenly out of the brushwood of Mr. Carpenter's precepts, and stood in the clear air between the ugly and the beautiful, the vulgar and the splendid, the thing he liked and the thing he hated. It was a place where the old idea of evil was difficult to see.

But luncheon was good, and so was golf, and Keddy

distinguished himself at both of them. Robinson was garrulous, and many schemes were resolved in Keddy's mind while he listened. Was he, after all, such an innocent? At any rate he was becoming an innocent of the political type, and, after golf, his politics took him on a mission of diplomacy to Pollock.

About Keddy's diplomatic methods there was nothing hustled or uncomfortable. There were many preliminaries to go through. To begin with, the sight of Pollock was so refreshing after an afternoon with Robinson that Keddy was quite a long time grinning at him in sheer enjoyment. Then came the contemplation of tea and the fire, both of them welcome. Next, with practised eye, this darling of the gods brought cushions to a chair, and arranged the back and seat thereof in a manner so true to Nature that at every point his tired body was supported by the concentrated force of down, and without strain or inconvenience his legs could dangle from the arm of the chair, and steam and dry at the fire. All of this was tested and found good. Then, with conscious guilt, 'I've been playing golf at Hinksey with Robinson.'

The son of a permanent under-secretary who dated from the days of patronage, Arthur Pollock was a man whose motive spring was neither in his heart nor his head, but in his nerves. A close examination would have shown how this governing stimulus applied. If he had given himself an education above the average it was because an uneducated man invariably turned his stomach. If his dress was a triumph and his manners a poem it was because defects in either would have grated like a knife on a plate. He was not a prig, and not a snob, speaking properly, but the effect of this world's vulgarity on any of his five senses produced a reflex action hard to distinguish from the qualities of such. His affection for Keddy was itself constitutional. Keddy had never jarred him. And in Keddy he had confidence, so that he did not seriously fear the dangers of his playing golf with Robinson. The thing could be treated lightly.

'Keddy, I can't let you out of my sight for five minutes,' he said.



'No, really you can't. Oh, jam sandwiches! Well, you know, I don't think he corrupted me—very much. And I swear I'll never do it again.'

'You've sworn that before,' said Pollock with severity, an accusation which greatly amused Keddy.

'He is funny,' Keddy remarked. 'He calls the King Teddy Guelph. I had to ask him who he meant.'

Pollock told him that when he was a thorough Tathamite he'd understand the humour of that kind of thing.

'And he told me he always makes a point of behaving to titled people just exactly as he would behave to plain ladies and gentlemen.'

This was accompanied by an upward glance of guilty amusement to see if Pollock thought the bounds of good nature had been transgressed.

'Oh, Keddy, and don't *you*?' Pollock asked him, tempted by the joy of teasing. But Keddy was afraid he had really never noticed if he did or not. Another remark of Robinson's was that he had come to Oxford as much for the social as for the educational advantages. 'Isn't it sad, because I'm sure he knows hardly anyone.'

That should have proved to Pollock that his reckless pupil was not much corrupted as yet. The use of the word 'anyone' was a guarantee of social orthodoxy. It served another purpose too; it brought Keddy to the serious business of the afternoon.

'What's going to happen about Bobby Wilton?'

'How do you mean?' Pollock asked. Keddy's sudden attacks of solemnity were always interesting.

'About him and Curly and all the other men.'

'They ought all to be tied up in a sack together and shaken,' said Pollock with the detachment of a Pontius Pilate.

'Oh, do you think so?' said Keddy.

To Pollock the whole subject was unsavoury and fit to be avoided. His heavy brow clouded; he blew out a long shaft of cigarette smoke contemptuously. He condemned equally the crime and the punishment. He did not invite discussion of the affair. ¶ 3

But Keddy twisted himself into a new attitude as

comfortable as the last. 'What I mean is, I shouldn't like Bobby to grow into a kind of Robinson, a kind of outcast, you know, and know nobody.'

Pollock was interested again.

'Why wouldn't you like that?' he asked kindly.

'It would be—horrid,' said Keddy. 'It puzzles me like anything. I don't know why, but it would make me—it would make me feel *sick*.'

One thing was clear, as Pollock explained. If Bobby continued to do outrageous things he could not expect to be welcomed back into society. That was only right. Keddy admitted it. He could not but admit so natural an extension of the principle of avoidance. Only, he insisted, it sickened him. 'Why is it that you sometimes know a thing is right, and yet it makes you sick. It's damned funny!'

On the relation of moral precision to æsthetic sensibilities Pollock was a power to be reckoned with. While Keddy sat silent he explained how governments and societies depend for their existence on ignoring the æsthetic inclinations again and again, and regarding only what is useful or right. Does not the ideal parent, he asked, feel disgust and regret when he has to smack his boy?

'Oh,' said Keddy, looking very comfortable, 'I don't think I should mind that a bit. It's quite different from cutting Bobby. Now will you do me a favour and make Curly and company take him back as if nothing had happened? You could if you tried, I'm sure.'

Pollock's æsthetic sense was affected, like Keddy's, by a certain nausea, but it was for different reasons. The whole affair was messy, and mess was emphatically not in Pollock's line. 'It rests entirely with Bobby himself,' he said.

'Will you,' Keddy repeated, 'do me that favour?'

'To save you from feeling sick?'

'Yes,' said Keddy, the reason appearing perfectly adequate.

'Why don't you go to him yourself, Keddy, and comfort him?'

Pollock spoke half mockingly, but Keddy turned his head towards him, deeply serious.

'I simply couldn't,' he said. 'Do think, I'm the man who found him in his—who saw him last night after it had been done, when he ought to have been left alone. I went to look on fallen Antony. I expect he simply hates me.'

'You've a very low idea of human nature,' said Pollock.

'Besides,' Keddy continued gravely, 'I don't like him.'

That was too much for Pollock. He lay back in his chair, and laughed until Keddy thought he must have been guilty of one of those unconscious *doubles entendres* with which he so often delighted his new friends. He did not often see Pollock laugh like that. He watched, lit a cigarette, and finally was compelled to join in the laugh. Pollock got up and stood with his back to the mantelpiece.

'Keddy, you'll be the death of me. D'you think I don't know that you fell over head and ears in love with Bobby from the first moment you saw him?'

'I don't like him,' said Keddy.

'Oh, you disgraceful liar!'

'It's not a lie. I don't like him. He makes my nerves twitch; he makes my nerves twitch like the devil. If he were to come into this room now I couldn't go on sitting here; I should go and balance on the edge of the table. He has an effect upon me.'

'He frightens you,' said Pollock, 'but you do like him all the same. It's nonsense to say you don't. Otherwise you wouldn't be so anxious about him.'

'All the same,' Keddy persisted dreamily, 'I don't like him. It's funny. It puzzles me like anything. I wonder what it means.'

Yes, for a moment he wondered and gazed into the fire. Then an answer came, and pleasure danced in the blue eyes.

'I've got it, Arthur, I've got it. I don't like him, but I do like him when he makes a picture.'

'Makes a picture!' Pollock repeated the words, seeing from Keddy's delight that they were to take rank among

the famous phrases. 'When does he do that? Did he do it when you went to his room last night? He's always the handsomest man in the college.'

'No,' said Keddy, flinching even now at the allusion to last night. 'But he did make a picture in the quad this morning when Tatham's fellows were watching him walk past. He did! It was splendid! Now may I have my favour granted?'

Pollock stood by the fireplace, and contemplated the smoke of his cigarette. Keddy's request he might have met by argument. He might have proved it absurd, unpleasant, tending to evil, and Keddy would have agreed. Keddy, he knew, would have listened attentively, saying, 'Yes,' 'I see,' 'Of course,' as each argumentative point was made. Keddy would have been reasonable, but every time a suitable pause occurred Pollock knew he would hear the same words: 'And may I have my favour granted?' He had not known Keddy for nine years without learning the meaning of that straight look about his eyes. So he watched his smoke; he shrugged his shoulders; he would see what could be done.

Keddy walked back across the quad thinking of the times when Wilton had made a picture, while Pollock sat in his room and thought of the things that made Keddy feel sick. Presumably the world would call it rather fine of Keddy to work for Wilton's reinstatement, especially if he did not altogether like the man. But how strange were his motives! It was not generosity; it was a mere æsthetic sensibility, and Pollock sat and wondered. Keddy disliked the idea of Wilton's outlawry as other men would dislike to see a famous picture cut from a fine old frame. That was enough to rouse him into action, to transport him magically to the mental attitude which Pollock only reached by contemplation of his duty as a Christian. It was pleasing without doubt in Keddy, but if Pollock was sure of anything it was in his belief that a house built on æsthetic sensibilities is a house built on sand. Keddy was a source of worry. Had Pollock kept a diary he would have filled a larger space that night with

the chronic case of Keddy than with the case of Bobby, which was so acute.

But elsewhere Bobby was the topic. To the unfortunate Tremayne, whose eyebrow had been cut in half by a lump of coal, there went a fair number of the world's great men on a visit of condolence after hall. Pollock brought Keddy, for his soul's health, to disinfect him after Robinson. And the entrance of Keddy had its usual consequences. How could he look so good and be so bad, they asked the moment they saw him. To dine with an ultramontane parson at St. Saviour's House ! It was disgraceful ! He was a dangerous character ; let him go out of the room at once ! So, having achieved the end of making him blush and laugh, they proceeded to violence, while Keddy in vain refused to be bullied, and shyly produced the most disparaging language he had yet learned to use with sufficient grace and readiness. Let him say his prayers as a proof of Protestant orthodoxy, they suggested. ' At whose knees ? ' he asked, greatly daring on the path of flippant wit. He dropped into the corner of a sofa, only to be rolled over by the irresistible Curly, and compelled to struggle and fight. ' I suppose none of you remember that jolly heart of mine,' he gasped, ceasing his struggles for a moment beneath the weight of conflicting humanity, and was the first to laugh at such a comic suggestion. ' Six to one, you great beasts ! ' But the entertainment had been as successful as usual. Keddy had used bad language, had slapped Curly's face, had been reduced to picturesque disorder. They told him there had never been anyone like him for starting a fight, which, in a sort of passive sense, was true.

Yet these were the men who wrecked Bobby's room. Now they were talking of it, and Keddy, recruiting himself on the sofa with Curly blowing smoke in his face to annoy him, became observant and a practical politician. Were they going to have Bobby back again ?

How he had fought ! That was the topic for a while. He had been like a wild beast ; you didn't seem able to hurt him. There was no catching hold of him ; he was beside himself, would have done anything, and killed any-

one had he had the chance. 'If I'd known he could fight like that I'm damned if I'd have gone for him at all.'

This apparently pusillanimous sentiment was taken in the sense intended. There was indeed a kind of shame among the heroes of last night, and Keddy spotted it with delight. The point to bring forward was Bobby's undoubted excellence in some respects.

'You should have seen him in the quad this morning when Tatham and a lot of those men were looking at him.'

That was Keddy's contribution.

'Yes, all the swine in the college will be at him now,' said Curly, winning thereby more gratitude than by all his past kindness to Keddy.

But what a fight it had been! Who was it who stopped him throwing the coal-scuttle? There'd have been murder if he had succeeded in that. It was a pity they couldn't get more water though.

'How can a man hit and struggle like that when he's so devilish thin and slight? He hasn't got any muscle really. How does he do it?'

'Ask Keddy,' said Pollock, thinking of vitality. 'He knows how it's done.'

'Oh, it's just his spunkiness,' said poor Keddy.

'Has anyone seen him to-day?'

That was better. They were coming nearer the point. But no one had seen him. They thought he would probably lie quiet for a time.

'Poor old Bobby,' said Pollock, after a pause. 'I expect he's feeling rather low to-day. We must have him at Curly's twenty-first, and pet him a lot.'

If they showed anything it was assent. Keddy could hardly sit still for admiration and gratitude.

## CHAPTER V

### A LONE HAND

ON the first of March, in the year nineteen hundred and five, Curly Edwards celebrated his twenty-first birthday and Bobby Wilton made a picture. Full in view of everyone important he made it, under the limelight, in blazing colours, with art that was his alone. Nothing more sensational could have been devised. The effect on the spectators was seismic.

The facts were these. It was agreed among Wilton's well-wishers that as the wrecking of his room had been less than a fortnight since, he should not be present at Curly Edward's dinner. That might possibly have been embarrassing. But when the party returned to college they would send half a dozen people to fetch him to Curly's room, and the reconciliation could take place under the convivial influences by that time prevailing. As a matter of fact, about ten men went on this errand; among them were Curly himself, and Pollock, and Keddy, who had thought of little else all through dinner. So again Wilton's passage sounded the tramp of an excited crowd, and again Curly Edwards led them into his room. Keddy was on fire. Pollock, faithful to his promise, was admirable. He sat on the arm of Wilton's chair, and shut up his book with a bang; indeed, he was so giddy as to knock off a long piece of cigarette ash by means of Wilton's nose, in the hope that an insult to that very straight and shapely organ might serve to break the ice. It did, for Wilton hit back quite prettily, as he might have done a month ago. He got up and stretched

himself. and regarded the party with benevolence. It happened, he said, that he had a box of really presentable cigars for the first time in his life, and here they were, a present from a maiden aunt and godmother. Liqueurs also he provided, and the festivities showed signs of taking root in his room. Everyone was happy and furiously friendly.

'What's this?' said Tremayne, who was now a man with a scar; he was looking at a sheet of notepaper that stood on the mantelpiece. Wilton told him to read it. A man had scribbled it down that afternoon, he said, and they all understood it to refer to an evolutionary sermon preached in chapel last Sunday.

'Mr. Colquhoun  
Said his prayers to a baboon.  
He said, "It's not profanity,  
But developed Christianity."'

It was greeted with a due measure of applause, and a man who sat at the open window yelled out to a group in the quad: 'Porker Colquhou-oun, says his prayers to a baboo-oon!' That would certainly become a popular night-cry.

'What's the betting Arthur wrote that?' said Tremayne, for it was common knowledge that Pollock regarded the chaplain, whether as vulgarian or as muscular Christian, with irritation that bordered on frenzy.

'But he didn't,' said Wilton.

Then the trouble came. Curly was standing by the table fingering a syphon. Wilton sat on the corner of the table swinging his legs. Curly wanted to say something; he was excited; he was happy; he was daring; and certainly the allusion he made was not a happy one in this room where the skin was yet thin grown over the wounds of a bitter resentment. For the allusion to Pollock's dislike of Colquhoun recalled inevitably the wrecking of this room—an event on which the chaplain had repeatedly expressed himself in a way that had nearly made Pollock scream. It had been Pollock's last case against Colquhoun, and not his least effective.



Alas for the working of mental associations at unguarded moments !

'Porker's becoming a regular red rag to Arthur,' Curly said to Wilton. 'His feelings for him are rather like yours for poor old Bramshaw.'

'Or like your governor's for your divorced mamma,' said Wilton.

There was no denying it was a picture. The words were spoken with just that graceful toss of the head, that insolent challenge of eyes which dart straight as an arrow for the eyes of the foe, that made the picture most excellently Wiltonesque. There was also what Keddy had noticed long ago, the invitation to Curly to hit him, the perfect coolness. But by as much as the picture was a good one, by so much was the subject a bad one. Here was a thing not mentioned at any time except in closest confidence, and out of the ten men present, five, perhaps, had been as ignorant of the scandal as was Keddy himself. And here it was, thrust at Curly on the night of his birthday by one who handled a rapier with the skill of the very devil. This was not the mere clumsy flourish of a boorish hand in horse-play. It was the neat thrust of an artist, pointed with malice.

Curly's wide blue eyes looked steadily at Wilton's, and for a moment no one would have been surprised had the invitation to hit been accepted. Then he threw his cigar into the fire, and went out of the room.

The first to follow him was Tremayne.

Keddy saw Pollock move, and seized his arm. The bridge of Keddy's hopes was falling arch by arch.

'Don't go,' he said.

'Yes ; I'm going.'

'Oh, don't ; for God's sake, don't ! Stay and help. Try and make a joke of it.'

But Curly was the only person who could possibly have made a joke of it, and he had made it the reverse.

Pollock freed himself from Keddy, and went out of the room. The others went also. Keddy heard their voices in the passage : 'Better leave the beast alone' ; 'He's had his chance.' And when, for an instant, he risked

a glance at Wilton himself, it seemed to him that he caught in his face the passing shadow of the tragedy those words proclaimed.

But Keddy did not go. He and Wilton were left alone.

‘Whatever made you say such a stupid thing?’

‘Keddy on moral etiquette!’ The words had an edge.

‘But it was really. It was about the stupidest thing you could have done.’

‘Then why don’t you go away like the rest?’

That question, spoken in tones that demanded an answer, opened Keddy’s eyes to the embarrassment of his position. Wilton got off the table, and looked at him without particular friendliness.

‘Well, the fact is, I forgot to,’ Keddy said, and laughed at himself for saying it.

But it had not been wholly absent-mindedness. It was a bit of Keddy’s obstinacy. It was where his ideas diverged from Pollock’s. It was Keddy’s lone hand.

‘These dinners do make you want to smoke,’ he said as he stood nervously by the table. ‘I hate cigars. Have you any tobacco?’

Wilton put tobacco before him, and there was silence while Keddy filled his pipe. He took some time about it, spent care upon it, but it could not last for ever. Something would have to happen when it was done. And Wilton was standing on the hearthrug, looking in front of him. It was hardly surprising that Wilton should be rather dazed, when the disaster was not five minutes old.

But in Oxford things move quickly. There is speed in the air, a kind of oxygen which makes things bud and bloom and wither at a wonderful pace. And Keddy had breathed this air.

On the other occasion when he had gazed on fallen Antony his one idea had been to escape. This time he was different, and he struggled another way. And his first thought, while he stood bracing himself for the work, was very practical. If he was to save his æsthetic

sensibilities from shock by personally effecting the reinstatement of Wilton in society—and it was nothing less than this that he proposed—he might as well begin by trying to feel tolerably at ease in the man's presence. He must grow used to the spikiness. He chose a chair, dropped into it, and arranged himself with a cushion. Symbols like this affect the atmosphere; and with the tragedy that hung about this room, one needed it.

'Oh, by the way,' he said with magnificent courage, 'I want to ride.'

'To ride?' As on an other occasion, Wilton pulled himself together and faced the situation made by Keddy's intrusion. He was at least civil.

'Where can I get a horse?'

'They've got lots at the Randolph. I'll take you round there some time.'

'Oh, thanks,' said Keddy, very gratefully. 'To-morrow morning if you can.'

His spirits were getting higher. His courage had answered well. His pipe was going all right, and his body, for the time being, was at rest. With the help of a resolute imagination he could almost say he was at ease.

'I knew there was something I wanted, but I couldn't think what it was,' he said energetically, while Wilton walked up and down in a moody way at the other side of the room. 'I knew something had been wrong ever since I came up last term. It's like getting tea with sugar in it; at first you can't think what the devil's the matter with it. Then it struck me the other day that I'd not been on a horse for months. That's what's been wrong. When I was in Scotland I used to ride every day for years. It was the only thing they'd let me do.'

Wilton, walking up and down, filled the pause with a politeness that could hardly be said to verge on sympathy.

'I'll take you to the Randolph to-morrow,' he said.

Keddy hurried on. 'All the time I've been up I've never been further out of Oxford than Hinksey. I've never stuck so much in one place in my life. I really should like to see what it's like outside. Which is the

best way to go, I wonder. I like trees. What's it like out by Abingdon ?'

'You'd find trees on the way to Abingdon all right,' said Wilton.

But the shadow of the tragedy had not lightened much as yet.

'Oh, Lord, it will be ripping to get on a horse again,' the diplomatist continued. 'I didn't know how much I wanted it till now. You see, they won't let me row or anything, even if I should be any good. And I'm rather sick of golf. Arthur's given it up, and there's nobody to play with. Everybody seems to be always at the river. Besides, it isn't like a horse. With a horse there's the—the idea, you know, and the smell and the feel. It's like—well, it isn't like anything. It's a thing by itself.'

Wilton agreed. 'I didn't know you were such a horse-man,' he said.

Now the form of a sentence like that implies a certain interest in the person addressed, even though it be said across a room with little more than a suspicion of friendliness showing behind the spikes. It was Keddy's chance. He turned his face towards Wilton quickly, and said what would have given Mr. Carpenter sleepless nights for a week.

'I say—may I go for a ride with you some time ?'

'I should be delighted,' said Wilton, with neither more nor less than the due amount of enthusiasm.

It was no good ; Keddy could not possibly continue to sprawl in a chair in Wilton's presence. It had been fairly easy while the man was walking about at the other side of the room, still three parts stunned by the late catastrophe. But now he was coming over to the fireplace. And Keddy perceived that he was thinking no longer of what had happened, but of him and his riding proposal. In fact, Keddy was becoming the object of a curious scrutiny. He got up and leaned his back against the mantelpiece. 'I am making a fool of myself,' he thought, and immediately put the thought into words.

'Oh, why ?' Wilton asked politely. 'Didn't you mean to ask me to ride with you ?'

'No,' said Keddy; 'I meant you to ask me.'

The next thing that happened was very important indeed. For Wilton, instead of laughing at Keddy, smiled at him. The difference, from a diplomatic point of view, is immense.

'That's the first time I've ever seen you smile,' Keddy remarked.

'Was it a success?'

Keddy said it was not so bad; but he might, taking the whole incident as one, have called it the greatest success in the world. It was the precise moment at which the barometer rose with a bound. The catastrophe seemed to recede into the past. Wilton threw himself down on the sofa, and all in a moment he became less neat, less spiky, less polite.

'Shall it be to-morrow?' Keddy asked under these encouraging influences.

'To-morrow? What?'

'Oh, our ride,' said Keddy.

Wilton looked into the fire. He had curled himself up on the sofa, his head on a pillow, in the most comfortable way imaginable. But Keddy, whose perceptions were very acute just now, was aware of a drop in the temperature.

'Well, that depends,' Wilton said. 'I may be going up to London to-morrow. I don't know.'

Now Keddy did not like delay, and his face showed it.

'It depends on the fellow I'm going with,' Wilton explained. 'He's arranging it. I'll find out from him. He ought to have been round here before now.'

The delay might be annoying, but its cause had no particular significance for Keddy. It did not affect his resolve to make the most of advantages already gained.

He looked round the room, and liked it; he liked the habitable appearance it wore. The pictures pleased him, the school groups, the two engravings of a great stone house, and the photographs of boys and undergraduates upon the mantelpiece. He liked the letters lying about on the desk by the window. He liked the cheque-book flung carelessly on the table in the corner, and the novel

lying open on the floor. It was easy, it was light, and it did not suggest an outcast's garret. Nor did Wilton himself look like the outcast as he lay there on the sofa.

He asked about the big stone house, and went over to look at the picture. It was Wilton's home, or rather his grandfather's, and Keddy remembered that he was his grandfather's heir. The topic went well.

He asked about the football photographs, and the peculiarities of the species of football they played with those things tied round their heads like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. He struck a match to find Wilton in the groups, and here also things went well.

Standing by the mantelpiece he took up the rhyme about Colquhoun, and laughed at it again.

'Who did write it?' he asked.

'Oh, it's Joseph Delville's,' Wilton answered, with indifference that betrayed a note of artificiality.

That name meant a good deal to Keddy.

He put back the rhyme in its place, and his mind recurred to several talks with Arthur Pollock in which the name of Delville had stood for the type and descriptive mark of a well-defined 'force' in the life of the college.

'Oh, do you know *him*?' he asked, with little thought whether the stress on the last word were wise or foolish.

'He's a clever fellow,' said Wilton, blowing out smoke.

'But——'

One syllable is quite enough to base regret upon. Keddy was only glad the rest of the sentence had not come out. What a fool he was! Why, this was the very thing he had dreaded, the very possibility he had held up to frighten Pollock. Yet now that he found it true he had blundered into betraying the most tactless surprise. Indeed, in this room, with these pictures and this growing comfort and the talk of riding, it did seem wonderful that Wilton, the blood, should confess to friendship with the man who led the Sons of Ishmael, the outcasts of society. Was Wilton adhering to the force of Delvillism? Was he to be one of those who made war on decent people and on decency? Oh, Arthur had described those men.

So surprise was on Keddy's face before he controlled it.

And then he looked down and kicked the hearthrug. He had made a slip. It was dangerous to make slips with Wilton.

'I find it suits my convenience to see something of Delville,' Wilton observed. 'He's a clever fellow. One gets tired of one's own company.'

It cut Keddy like a knife. For in so far as Wilton, after three weeks of outlawry, cared to confess that he had suffered, the confession was in those words and that tone. And what could be said in answer?

Anyhow, it was too late. Wilton was off the sofa, and was cool, collected, alert, and painfully unflinching.

'In fact, it's with Delville I'm going to town to-morrow,' he said. 'Or I may be.'

Keddy went on kicking the hearthrug. He had lost ground terribly since the ride was arranged just now. His tongue clave to his mouth, and his hand forgot its cunning. He had done a stupid thing, and was not to escape his punishment.

'He's got a girl he's going to show me,' Wilton went on. 'But I don't expect we shall go to-morrow, because she has an old beast of a father who gets drunk on absinthe all over the house, and he'll be there.'

Keddy knew perfectly well that this information was given him as a challenge. If he objected to Delville, if he objected to girls with disreputable fathers, then let him go, and be damned to him. Thus it was he understood it. He looked at his watch, and indeed it was high time he went back to Curly's party.

'Oh, must you go?' Wilton asked, never more frigidly polite.

Keddy held the door open, and kept his hand on the handle. Wilton had challenged him. Now he would challenge Wilton.

'And if you don't go to-morrow—then—what time shall we ride?'

'Oh, half-past two.'

Keddy went out into the quad, and tried to calculate the extent of his recklessness. He had never in his life done such an extraordinary thing as to-night. And was

he glad? Would he be glad when it came to the point to-morrow afternoon? He could not tell; his mind was in a muddle, and he wanted Pollock to straighten it out.

Pollock he caught when Curly's party had dispersed, and forthwith he lamented the evening's calamity.

'You see,' Pollock told him, 'getting Bobby back among the old lot of people is all very well in theory, but in practice a man who does things like this makes himself impossible, and there's nothing for it but to cut him quietly. What do you think we should come to if we were all of us always doing this kind of thing? You must see we can't have it.'

They were in Pollock's room. Keddy kicked the hearthrug miserably.

'I do wish he hadn't done it,' he said.

Pollock was rather annoyed. 'So do I,' he answered, 'and you needn't think you're the only person who's sorry for Bobby. But we can't go on treating a man like that as one of us.'

'But he *is* one of us,' Keddy insisted.

'Then he can't be any longer.'

Thus they argued, but it was the argument of a fly with a spider. 'I ought to be free,' Keddy said; 'to be caught in this web is horrible.' 'But caught you are,' Pollock could answer, 'and it is the web of organized society from which there is no escape. Keddy could appeal to nothing but his poor æsthetic sensibilities, while behind Pollock was the obvious force of the inevitable.'

'If a man goes on drinking, what on earth is the use of arguing that he ought not to die of D.T.? He does, and there's an end of it.'

'Well, I think it's beastly,' said Keddy.

Pollock told him to think what he liked.

'And he's being driven to go about with Delville. He goes to town with him to see women.'

Pollock shrugged his shoulders. He was not surprised.

'And I'm going for a ride with him to-morrow afternoon.'

Then Pollock awoke to a crisis.

'You mustn't,' he said earnestly. 'Keddy, really this



is serious. Don't you see what it means. Bobby has done for himself. No one will have anything to do with him. It's dangerous for you to go about with him. You'll make people sick with you. You can't do it.'

'Still, I'm going for a ride with him to-morrow afternoon.'

To Pollock it was as if Keddy had begun to drop his h's. He scarcely knew what to say. What he did was to worry himself into a headache.

Keddy, however, from that same moment was definitely glad at what he had done. He would ride with Wilton, and whether it proved enjoyable or not, it would be the most gloriously independent act he had ever done in his life.

It gave Pollock a headache, and there were more headaches to follow as the term went on. Colquhoun, indeed, had never had a headache in his life. But he too expressed himself on the situation. 'Silly young ass,' he said, 'you fellows can no more manage a chap like that than fly.' It was after Keddy had ridden, not once, but several times, with Wilton. 'Why can't you smack his confounded head for him?'

'Curly tried that,' they told him. 'It ended in his treading on Curly's finger, and nearly breaking his heart when he knew what he'd done.'

Colquhoun, being a clergyman, could only say, 'Great Scott, this footling milksop spirit simply turns my stomach!'

Keddy's friend Robinson, who went to St. Saviour's House for social as well as spiritual salvation, told Mr. Carpenter about it. And then things moved. It was not that Mr. Carpenter discussed Keddy's affairs with Robinson. Half a dozen plain facts were enough for him. He got up quickly, and sought in his book of engagements for the next opportunity of having that anxious charge to a meal at St. Saviour's House.

A day came, therefore, when Keddy had a note from Mr. Carpenter asking urgently for an interview before the Easter vacation began. He was to go to St. Saviour's

House, either for tea on Friday, or for luncheon on Thursday, or on Friday at eight o'clock after dinner, or any time between twelve and one on Wednesday. If none of these times were possible he was to let Mr. Carpenter know immediately, and Mr. Carpenter would try to arrange something else. Much invited as he was, however, Keddy did manage to squeeze in Friday's tea among his engagements. This was the last week of the term, and he had ridden half a dozen times with Bobby Wilton. The spikiness had been wearing off rather rapidly.

Into the small room at St. Saviour's House, comfortably furnished, well sprinkled with photographs, Keddy went with mixed feelings. He was very fond of Mr. Carpenter. He regarded him as some people regard a journey by train; it is enjoyable, you see a lot of country, the pace is exhilarating, but sometimes you are unpleasantly jolted at the curves and points. Afterwards you may have a headache.

Whatever might be the cause of the pressing summons, Keddy was sure Mr. Carpenter had never greeted him more warmly than now. He took him to the fire, put him into the largest armchair, remarked jovially upon his very muddy boots.

'Oh, I'm so sorry,' said Keddy. 'I did try to get the mud off. I've been for a long walk with Arthur Pollock.'

Mr. Carpenter, making tea, laughed away his apologies. Clean carpets were not supposed to be a feature of the House, he said. And where had Keddy walked to?

'Well, Malcolm, I expect when you're my age you won't have walked as many miles as I have. Good gracious, what walks we used to have! It's no safeguard against growing fat, I'm afraid. I'm a standing proof of that. In my last undergraduate year I once walked all the way to Eton in a day.'

'Did you really?' said Keddy. 'I should simply hate that.' But was it to talk of walking that he had been so urgently sent for?

'One has to go by train now,' said Mr. Carpenter. 'And very inconvenient it is sometimes. I do think the

Great Western might treat Oxford a little more kindly, Malcolm.'

Were they going to compose a letter to the general manager, Keddy thought.

'Now the other evening I had to wait at Reading for an hour and a quarter. In fact, my journey back from Eton took me nearly three hours, and you can come from London in very little over one.'

'You must have been tired,' said Keddy, still at sea. They were eating bread-and-butter.

'At the end of a hard afternoon's work, too, Malcolm. Upon my word, it *was* an afternoon.'

'Oh, what were you doing?' asked the innocent Keddy.

Things were going well. Mr. Carpenter shook his head, and looked into the fire.

'I was sent for to see a poor boy who was in great trouble. A sad case, Malcolm dear, one of the saddest gambling cases I remember. But, good gracious! The folly of schoolmasters is simply appalling. What I say is—how can you blame boys for falling when temptations are positively thrust upon them? Leave the boys alone as much as possible, that's what they tell me, but——' And Mr. Carpenter laughed with gay irony.

'I suppose it's different at big schools,' said Keddy the schoolmaster's son and future schoolmaster.

'Very different indeed,' laughed Mr. Carpenter.

'Now this poor boy, a dear boy he is, he went to Eton just as innocent as a boy could be. I'd had many talks with him. But, I said to myself, there's trouble ahead for you, young man, unless you make friends with the right kind of boys. I knew it. I told them so. It was one of those cases of good-natured weakness, very difficult cases. He got among bad companions and took to gambling, and now there's a pretty kettle of fish.'

All this Mr. Carpenter said leaning back in his armchair and brushing, from time to time, the crumbs from his cassock. Keddy was very sorry for the poor boy who had taken to gambling. He would have liked to hear the whole story from beginning to end. But Mr. Carpenter, who had eaten two pieces of bread-and-butter rather

quickly, now leant forward over his knees and clasped his hands before him.

'Doesn't it bring home to one, Malcolm dear,' he said in graver tones, 'how terribly, terribly, important it is to keep out of temptation's way? They praise innocence, you know, but for my part I'm beginning to think innocence a positive curse. It's not the really bad boys and men who come into trouble; it's the innocent, ignorant ones whom a helping hand might have saved. It's fearful! Terrible! And what a responsibility it puts upon one!'

'I'm sure you always do all you can,' said Keddy, this being just one of those curves in the journey which distressed him.

'Dear old boy,' said Mr. Carpenter, putting a hand on Keddy's knee; 'about yourself—are you being very careful about your friends? Are you remembering, are you watching for the dangers?'

'What you mean,' said Keddy, 'is Bobby Wilton.'

The result of this disconcerting announcement, besides saving a good deal of time, was to make Mr. Carpenter laugh and squeeze Keddy's knee, and remember that he had not offered him a cigarette.

'Turkish or Egyptian?'

'Turkish,' Keddy answered. 'Thanks awfully. Now let's go on talking about Bobby.'

'Well,' said Mr. Carpenter, 'well, I'm afraid I've been listening to the most shocking gossip, but they tell me you do see a good deal of him now. You ride together.'

So Keddy fell back on his æsthetic sensibilities, and explained the whole affair honestly and not without enthusiasm. He told how Wilton had done stupid things, how the college bloods had treated him stupidly, how he had been stupid again, and then they, and finally Pollock, who was stupid enough to think the situation hopeless. Everyone was stupid. And it was such a pity for Wilton to get mixed up with a lot of horrid dull men whom nobody knew. Mr. Carpenter nodded and sucked his lips as the story wore on. Before it was finished he had captured one of Keddy's hands.

'Dear old boy,' he said, squeezing this pledge of sympathy, 'it was good of you, it was like you. I'm so glad, so glad you have those feelings. We don't forget that text about "Inasmuch as ye have done it," do we? But, Malcolm, are you quite sure it is altogether wise for you?'

Now what struck most forcibly on the ears of the budding philosopher was the astonishing ease with which Mr. Carpenter made that reconciliation between æsthetics and morality which had puzzled him so greatly. He began to feel uncomfortably good, and his abstraction may have caused the silence which Mr. Carpenter mistook for guilt.

'You see, dear old boy, some of us are called to help those who are in trouble. We do it every day, and it's our duty. But with you it is different. Your duty is quite different. Your duty is to take care of yourself.'

For Mr. Carpenter knew the Keddy type too well to trust it as he loved it.

'But what's the danger?' Keddy asked.

'Malcolm dear!'—and a pressure of the hand.

'Well, I don't see it,' said Keddy. 'Bobby glued Mr. Bramshaw's coat, and I go out riding with Bobby, but that doesn't mean that I'm going to glue Mr. Bramshaw's coat too!'

Mr. Carpenter laughed heartily. 'I should think not, my dear boy!' He lay back in his chair, and clasped his hands behind his head. 'Poor Mr. Bramshaw would hardly have a coat left. Well, that's one crime we've ruled out, isn't it? We're getting on famously. Do you ever meet any of Wilton's friends?'

This was another of Mr. Carpenter's dangerous swift shots, and Keddy met it, as of old, by a pause.

'Oh yes, when I go to his room.'

'H'm.'

'I must meet them, you see, if they're there.'

'But, dear old boy, are you sure,' Mr. Carpenter asked, stretching forward again, 'are you quite sure Wilton is the sort of man it is wise for you to know? Have you thought about it seriously? Have you asked to be helped, Malcolm?'

'But why shouldn't he be?' said Keddy. 'He's done nothing wrong. He's only rather stupid sometimes.'

'But care, Malcolm, care is never thrown away. One can never, never be too careful.'

'I tell you what it is,' said Keddy with much gravity, 'I think I'm beginning to disagree with that sort of thing. I think I'm beginning to take—a rather wider view.'

'Naturally, naturally,' said Mr. Carpenter, though he looked like someone climbing Snowdon against a blizzard. 'But, Malcolm——' And Mr. Carpenter came to a full stop.

What he wanted to do was to explain to Keddy the things he had heard about Wilton, and what he wanted to avoid was the slandering of an absent man who could not defend himself. The difficulty was torturing. Nor did he get much help from Keddy.

'If he wants me to do anything wrong, I'll refuse, and there's an end of it. Isn't that enough?'

'But, Malcolm dear, the man himself—is he *quite*—is he really what we want? Is he the kind of man you would like to take home?'

'Oh, I think so,' Keddy replied with some interest. 'I don't think he'd do any of his stupid things at home, you know.'

It was too much. Mr. Carpenter leaned on his knee and drummed with his heel on the ground.

'But are you *sure* of him, Malcolm?'

'Won't it do,' said Keddy, 'if I'm sure of myself?'

Mr. Carpenter's plump face puckered into lines of impotent distress. He had quite stared the fire out of countenance.

'Malcolm dear—there are things——'

'What?' said Keddy. He had not been listening. He had been wondering what it would have been like if such a very curious man as Mr. Carpenter had happened to be not quite a gentleman.

'There are things, dear old boy, things one must find out about a man, about a friend, I mean, and remember, if one is to be quite, quite safe. One must watch, and be ready, and pray, Malcolm dear, and be ready for a pitfall at any

moment. Sin is so terribly easy to glide into. One must never be off one's guard, even with the best of friends, I'm afraid. And every step onwards may be a step towards danger. Don't think me foolish for warning you. But I know ; I've seen ; it's so terribly important.

This was becoming positively incoherent. How much Keddy understood it was difficult to estimate, and, indeed, he had a fair idea that the basis of the matter was in certain people's habit of going up to London for the day. How much he chose to seem to understand was only too clear.

'I tell you what I'll do,' he said with a brilliant inspiration. 'I'll have you to tea to meet Bobby the first thing next term, and then you can have a look at him yourself, and ask him here.'

Mr. Carpenter could have wiped the sweat from his brow.

'But, Malcolm dear, you still think seriously ? You still care about important things ?'

That was his soul and his purity, Keddy knew. He still did think seriously. The discussion of this point left Mr. Carpenter very tolerably satisfied.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WIDER VIEW

SOONER or later all questions become political, and the man who never made an intrigue never made anything. Inevitably, as events went forward and the Easter term became the summer term, as Wilton's line of conduct grew more clear, and Keddy's more alarming, the well-wishers of the latter came together. Inevitably they talked about the crisis. By operation of Nature's laws they formed a party. And, however much they might have protested, Pollock, Colquhoun, and Mr. Carpenter, however resentfully and shockedly, yet the finger of truth must have pointed them out for three intriguers. They were turning into 'Keddy, Limited,' and emphatically they would not have enjoyed being told so, had Truth or Bobby Wilton been in a position to lay the horrid fact before them.

It began when Pollock and Mr. Carpenter found themselves alone in a second-class smoking carriage between Paddington and Oxford very early in the summer term. High and low Mr. Carpenter searched his pockets for a match. Anyone would have pitied his distress. Clearly there was not a match to be found, not a single one, and his cigarette was already in his mouth. He looked at Pollock; a flash of surprised delight awoke his face to animation. Might he ask him for a match? So stupid—so very stupid, to start on a journey without any! And surely Pollock's face was familiar? His college was identified. Even his name could be recalled. And Malcolm Forth—he was a friend of Malcolm Forth's, of



course, of course—and the worries of the coming term made Pollock disinclined to refuse the opening thus given. Exchange of information increased the anxiety of each. By well-draped euphemisms they reached agreement in their estimate of Wilton and his habits. In naked terms they said what would happen to Keddy if he pursued this reckless intimacy. Mr. Carpenter had a way with him, and it was not till Pollock was in a cab rattling up to college that he went flabby at the recollection of something said between Reading and Pangbourne, prefaced by, 'But, Pollock dear !'

The thought of that phrase gave Pollock a very nasty shock, and should have kept him from low intrigues for the future. Yet the lesson was not sharp enough, for Keddy's way of starting the term drove him to such straits that he was willing to discuss the problem even with Mr. Colquhoun. And, of course, he was furious with himself for having done it. Politics, like adversity, makes strange bed-fellows—bed-fellows who wake in the morning and regard each other with anything but enthusiasm. 'I'll soon knock that nonsense out of his head,' said Colquhoun promptly. 'I'll see him to-night and jolly well go for him.' Then Pollock awoke to regret that he had let himself be drawn into discussion of Keddy with this natural foe of all persons of taste.

Mr. Colquhoun did not let the grass grow under his feet. That very night, a night in early May, Keddy was walking up and down his room towards twelve o'clock, with nothing visible to account for the excitement in his eyes. Again and again he looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. Again and again he brought a bit of paper from his pocket, read it, smoothed it, folded it, and put it back. He could not read, not even a novel, and thus unsettled he was when Colquhoun set his fist upon the door. Colquhoun came in. He had not broken the panel ; and he did not break the chair into which he let his body fall. He was not successful in breaking things this night. He did not even break Keddy.

Keddy's first action when he saw his visitor was to feel the scrap of paper in his pocket. It was safe ; it should

remain safe ; and Keddy's manner was pleasant and easy enough when he offered the chaplain whisky and put another tumbler on the table. Colquhoun, of course, took the whisky and lit a pipe. There was none of your temperance nonsense about Colquhoun. He stood for sturdy British sense and moderation as regards alcohol and religion and all other things that tempt weak brethren to excess.

'Now you be a good chap and sit down there and listen to my jaw,' he said, stretching out his legs and wiping his brow with a handkerchief.

Keddy sat and listened. He was grave with polite attention. He was not so foolish as to look at the clock now, for when the hour is near midnight, what concern has an undergraduate with the time ?

Colquhoun's moral exhortation turned out to be quite different from that of St. Saviour's House. It was all in the ha, ha ! style, with variations of pooh pooh ! faugh ! and bah ! He had not come to slobber clerical bosh about sin and repentance, not he. Keddy got enough of that stuff at St. Saviour's House. He was probably jolly sick of it, as Colquhoun, with admirable finesse, allowed. 'But what I say is, think of the college.'

The interval allowed for this purpose Keddy spent in thinking of Colquhoun.

'Look here, Keddy, you're a sensible chap, and that's how I treat you,' the chaplain resumed, swinging round what remained of his whisky, so that the interior of the glass looked like an agitated funnel. 'I take it you know the difference between common-sense and silly tommy rot. Well, the long and short of it is, what *we* want this college to stand for is sense. We play games : that's sense ; we work : that's sense. And these precious new pals of yours think the only fine thing in the world is being vicious, and that's silly tommy rot. There it is. Take it or leave it.'

Keddy had sat silent for some time, rubbing his hand up and down his thigh. He suggested that Arthur Pollock was neither athletic, industrious, nor vicious. That seemed an interesting opening.

'Arthur's neither here nor there,' said Colquhoun. 'Don't you try your red herrings on me. You go messing about with Wilton, who's a cad, and if you do that I jolly well tell you we'll know the reason why. If you want to play those games, you've come to the wrong shop. So have they. We don't want sons of Ishmael here. It's this bunkum about living one's own life and going one's own way that's enough to run the whole college off the lines, and I tell you I'm going to nip it in the bud.'

He put down his glass on the table with a bang, and Keddy said, 'I see.'

'And the reason why I give you this warning is because I like you. See? I like you. I like you well enough to smack your head if I see you making a silly fool of yourself. And, what's more, I'll do it. There! And, mark you, I know more about Master Robert Wilton and company than you think.'

Keddy did not in the least enjoy hearing that the chaplain liked him. There was something uncomfortably one-sided about it, Keddy being utterly unable to return the feeling. He rubbed his hand up and down his thigh steadily and slowly, and suppressed a strong impulse to say that the evening was warm.

'And if I hear of you going up to London for the afternoon, there'll be trouble. See?'

Keddy remembered that person, still unknown, whose father drank absinthe all over the house.

'I don't think that's a bit likely,' he said.

'It had better not be. And while we're about it, my friend, the less you go to Wilton's room the better. That young gentleman has got to be cut, and by you as well as the others. We don't want exceptions here. Take your own time, but sooner or later you've got to cut him.'

'Oh, I don't think that's a bit likely either,' said Keddy.

Colquhoun looked as if he would say something striking. But he did not. He got up and held out his hand.

'Well, I've had my say. Plain speaking breaks no bones. Now shake hands to show there's no ill-feeling.'

Keddy shook hands. About the ill-feeling the less said the better. If not ill-feeling, there was, when the

door had shut on the huge figure of the chaplain, what he would have liked still less : there was contempt. Mr. Carpenter had tried since last October, Arthur had tried since the end of last term, and what they had failed to do Colquhoun believed he could accomplish in ten minutes. On the question of cutting Bobby Wilton Keddy had his own æsthetic views. On the moral question of avoidance, whether handled skilfully at St. Saviour's House, piteously in Arthur's room, or clumsily by Colquhoun, he had a new and mighty rampart in the wider view.

There is in Oxford a place in which the stillness of night seems to dwell like a god in his own temple, where there is scarcely a lighted window to jar the majesty of the hour. It is here that the heart of the academic city beats. The dome of the Radcliffe Library is in its midst, and round it hangs a space of ancient silence. To the south is St. Mary's Church, and the spire that makes all other spires appear like birds with feathers plucked. The long wall of All Souls is to the east, with its towers and its gates. To the west is Brasenose, to the north the Bodleian, where courtyards of inner silence are seen through the iron gate which night closes. No building of lesser dignity is allowed to share this place.

Leading from the precincts of the Bodleian to the cobbled ground without, there are three steps, and here on this soft, warm night of May, a dweller in Oxford sat. The iron gate was his prop, the highest step was his seat, his companion the loneliness of night. His dress, by a fiction almost ludicrous, was supposed to mark him as a young townsman and no undergraduate. But whatever the stick-up collar and black satin tie achieved in this line was more than neutralized by the grey flannel trousers and indiarubber shoes, while detection was ensured beyond the possibility of doubt by an easy magnificent attitude, no more like the ordinary Oxford townsman than a chimpanzee. And so, through the flimsiest of disguises, he was plainly an undergraduate, plainly an undergraduate breaking rules. For the hour of twelve was past, with its returning revellers and its

closing of all gates. An hour had elapsed since then, and the person sitting on the steps of the Bodleian was one who disregarded, not only spiked walls and broken glass, but also the obligation of implied trust which Colquhoun declared to be more effective than any obstacle the builders could devise to keep the decent undergraduate within walls after midnight. To sit sinning in such serene comfort, smoking a pipe and enjoying the beauty of night, is awful. It is surely a thing fearful in the abstract ; in the particular case a thing to strike horror, consternation, amazement, on several good persons in Oxford and elsewhere ; for the sinner was Keddy.

Familiar habits cling to one in unfamiliar scenes. The habit of filling solitude with luxurious reflection, formed in the loneliness of Scottish hills and by the silent banks of the Thames at night, was one which might slumber amid the bustle of a first year in Oxford. But beneath the dome of the Radcliffe and the stars beyond there was a compelling influence greater than caution or excitement. Keddy kept one eye open for a chance policeman. The rest of him, as he waited for the expected figure of a friend to descend from a window in Brasenose, was reflection and peace.

A year ago and he had said good-bye to the Perthshire manse which had been the larger part of his world. The Keddy of a year ago seemed a stranger to him now. Pleasantly marvelling, he studied that sweeping contrast. A year ago in these very trousers he had tramped along the hillside with his uncle to take soup to a dying woman. To-night there was a rent where a spike had questioned his passage over the wall. But what would they all say to see him now—his mother, Arthur Pollock, Mr. Carpenter ? Was it not about time to consider this and recur to souls and purity ? One thing was clear ; the old Keddy had been right when he shied at Bobby Wilton as the danger. So had Mr. Carpenter been right. Shrewd Mr. Carpenter, wary Mr. Carpenter, in his fear of Bobby he had not been mistaken. His prophetic instincts had been true, but his moral principles—— ? There the new

Keddy combated him, and more vigorously, more confidently than ever. Climbing by night might be a crime to Mr. Carpenter, but for Keddy there was now the wider view.

Well, he stretched out his legs again, leant back, and the exhilaration of the night was in him. There came no policeman to break his meditations. Would he ever get Bobby back into decent society? He did not know: it was harder than he had expected. And there were times, occasional times, when he did not very greatly care. The days of this term had gone pleasantly, what with Curly on one side and Bobby on the other. Curly might smack his head and call him a friend of publicans and sinners, but the punishment was far from being unpleasant. Arthur might distress himself—poor old Arthur!—and Porker Colquhoun might storm as he had done an hour ago in Keddy's room. Mr. Carpenter might strain and sweat, but it had come to this, that the meditative Keddy could not think of Mr. Carpenter without a smile. It was kindly, affectionate, sympathetic, but it was a smile. Mr. Carpenter was in bed, so were they all, and they did not know what it was to have a note from Bobby with instructions to meet Gordon of B. N. C. and take him to the rendezvous at one o'clock. They did not know what it was like to sit on the cool stone steps with the stars above and the smell of night around, and the drug of freedom working in one's veins. Keddy had gone crusading to save Bobby from outlawry, but it is the constant reward of good crusaders that they find pleasures by the way.

And then, in the silence, where in that Oxford holy of holies he enjoyed the wider view, there came a sound. It was a low whistle, and he sprang up from his stone seat. He looked towards a window in Brasenose Lane. He was alert; he sniffed for policemen, and walked, softly on rubber soles, tightly in well-knit caution, joyously in the exhilaration of the time, to beneath the window where the whistling sounded. 'Come on,' he whispered; 'you're late. Bobby will be sick.' And he stood with his hands in his pockets and his legs apart, looking up at one of Bobby's out-of-college friends.

'I'm not coming,' said the face from the window.

'Not coming?'

'No. The fact is—I say, is that a man down there?'

Keddy turned to look down the lane, and it might be that the scornful toss of his head was itself a part of the lesson learned from Bobby.

'It's only a shadow out of that window.'

'Well, look here, Carruthers was round in your college to-night, and he says Porker Colquhoun's fearfully on the hop about climbing. He's going to try and run us in one night this week. It's not good enough coming out to-night. You fellows had better get back as soon as you can.'

This Brasenose man was notoriously subject to nerves. Keddy struck a match and lit the remains of his pipe. Keddy's nerves were in better condition.

'All right,' he said, trying not to sound contemptuous. 'I'll tell Bobby. I say, how much does Porker know? Does he suspect any special place?'

But the alarmist did not know. 'I don't know any more than I've told you. Do go on and get Bobby back.'

'Bobby—yes, it's Bobby he's after,' Keddy murmured.

He felt by no means hurried. He knocked out his pipe, regardless of the noise, and filled again.

'Isn't Porker a beast? He's simply hunting Bobby.'

'Look here, you can't hang about here any longer,' the man urged from above. 'Do go on and tell the others.'

Keddy would have liked to stay and talk. He could not realize disaster, and, indeed, a novice is just as likely to believe in his charmed life as to tremble at his fated doom. He laughed, kicked the wall, and moved backwards.

'Well, then, good-night!'

'Good-night. Hurry up!' the man whispered.

So over the cobbles round the Radcliffe, Keddy started off all tied together with excitement that pricked and gripped deliciously. It was a time for using his own particular joy-cry, 'I feel my body, I feel my body!' He wriggled in sheer sensation. For the Brasenose man who had not set the nerves of fear on edge had intensified the pleasure of the night till Keddy could scarcely bear

it silently. There was danger—extra danger. As danger it tasted real to Keddy's lively palate ; as possible disaster it did not affect his perceptions in the least. It was the danger that made three-quarters of his joy—the joy of his eyes that watched this way and that, the joy of his noiseless feet, of his ears that kept control of every sound of the night, of his legs that might any moment start to run in flight—yes, and of his fist that perhaps might use the *ultima ratio* against the chance policeman. He was going to the rendezvous, the place where Bobby and Delville were waiting for him, out in Jowett Walk. He came to street corners, and moved out from the shadow of the wall, so that at the corner he might look both ways from the middle of the road, and, should danger loom from the right, take to his heels to the left. The man in whom the savage instinct has died, if such a man there is, deserves pity. He misses what made Keddy feel his body, the primitive thrill, the bubbles of joy in the blood. And if hunting is the first of savage joys, being hunted is the second. Down St. Helen's Passage was the narrow opening into Holywell. Was there, round the corner, a policeman under the lamp ? Listening was the only thing, and Keddy waited. His ears were good and his luck was good, and out into Holywell he came triumphant. In Mansfield Road the city is thinning into villas and fields ; danger is less, escape is easy. And once more came the thought that life on Mr. Carpenter's lines meant bed at twelve and chapel in the morning. That Keddy had come through danger with the companionship of his own true senses and pleasurable wits, that this was the trysting-place, that Bobby and Delville waited in the shadow there, all this he owed to the wider view.

Joseph Delville was the central figure of the society that Wilton had now made his own. It had needed some extension of the wider view before Keddy agreed to know him. But it came about ; it had happened last week, and Keddy was surprised again. For instead of the satyr-like figure he expected, he found a man of indolent and sad appearance, handling vice and virtue with a



single aim of tickling his subtle sense of humour. He was as big a man as Curly Edwards ; in sheer force of muscle he would have been the better of the two. Incidentally he was a person of some academic distinction. Indolence had driven him to individualism, and individualism led on to outlawry. But indolence remained through all, and if decent people cut him, if the cave of Adullam formed round him, he neither grieved nor rejoiced. With him was Wilton, and in no pleasant temper.

'Damn you, Keddy ! What in the world have you been doing ? Where's Gordon ? Where have you been all this time ?'

Keddy was amused, as always when rudely addressed. He paused, to enjoy his amusement.

'Gordon wouldn't come,' he said. 'He's frightened. And Carruthers has told him that Porker wants to catch us one night this week. He says we'd better be careful. He advised us to get back quickly. Porker wants——'

'Porker can go and hang himself,' said Wilton.

'That's what *I* think,' said Keddy.

'And allow me to observe,' said Delville, taking Keddy's arm, 'that we shan't get back quickly, or get anywhere quickly to-night, as our poor Bobby is incapacitated with drink.'

Wilton made as if to hit him. 'Swine ! you're both swine,' he said, scorning the blow, and he turned away. It seemed that he would climb the wall of the road where they stood. But Keddy took hold of him and stroked down his anger. 'Where shall we go, Bobby ? What shall we do ?'

'We're going to Angel Square.'

Angel Square or anywhere else was all one to Keddy, so that only they stopped quarrelling and got to work again with those nocturnal senses whose exercise was poised at the top of all conceivable joy.

'Angel Square ! Then come along ; let's start.'

But Angel Square to Delville meant what it did not mean to Keddy. He stood in Wilton's path.

'No you don't,' he said. 'I swear you don't. Are you mad ?'

So all the charm of the occasion trembled to a fall while they quarrelled. Delville, cool and lazy, was obstinate, nevertheless. Wilton, even at more normal times, bore opposition hardly.

To his saner feelings Delville appealed in vain; he talked of the unconscionable hour, of Wilton's condition, of prudence, self-interest, while Wilton stamped on the ground.

'You've been there all the evening,' Delville said.

'Damn you! Why can't you leave me to play the game my own way?' said Wilton.

'What the devil is it?' asked the puzzled Keddy.

'I object to mixing my vices,' Delville declared. 'We're climbing, and Angel Square's got nothing to do with it. Besides, go there now, and it'll be the last time you ever see her.'

Keddy put his hands in his pockets and leant against the wall. He now understood the Delville point of view. But Wilton would not listen.

'Then Keddy and I will go back to college,' said Delville.

'Keddy will do as I tell him,' Wilton answered gloriously.

Thus may a statement be true in fact and false in import. That Keddy would go with Wilton was the truth. He did so, and took the reward of Wilton's gratitude and the praise that is due to a sportsman. But his motive was not obedience. All his blood cried out to him to stay with the night and the excitement, to be where danger still moved round them. A tame return to college would be beyond endurance. Even Delville came with them in the end, and the rolling tide of pleasure was not checked. Again the pavements were soft to Keddy's feet. Again his eyes and ears tingled like a palate answering to fine flavours. There was companionship in the background, excitement to the fore, with the eyes of the redskins gleaming through the forest trees. By the small roads between the High Street and the Broad they made their way back through the town. Cornmarket Street they crossed with feather tread,

running, watching, while the policeman at Carfax had turned the other way. Like a single organism the three of them responded to each sound ; with a single movement they darted down street passages, lurked with a single emotion while danger passed and went.

They were in the slummy streets towards the station when Keddy ventured on talk not relevant to the question of immediate safety.

‘ Bobby, I say, who is this woman we’re going to see ?’

‘ That’s what we should like you to tell us,’ said Delville in his cryptic way.

‘ Who is she ?’ Keddy asked. ‘ Is she someone you go to see in London ?’

It was a rough shot, but Wilton answered in the calmest way.

‘ No, damn you ! It’s the Oakes girl. She came down this afternoon with a pal. I couldn’t find any place to put them in except this hole in Angel Square. All the decent streets are full.’

‘ Angel Square is beastly,’ said Keddy.

‘ Not inappropriate, my dear Keddy,’ Delville remarked. ‘ Sounds seraphic, and turns out slightly squalid. Not inappropriate for Bobby’s lady visitors from London. Really quite appropriate.’

‘ You’d better stop that, Joseph,’ said Wilton.

Keddy tried another shot.

‘ Her father drinks absinthe, doesn’t he ?’

‘ The father drinks absinthe,’ Delville answered, ‘ and my teeth have been set on edge. Not Bobby’s, you see. The seraphic side is still predominant with him.’

These remarks were exchanged across Wilton, who walked between the others, leaning on their arms. His intervention from the middle was most effectual. He was not going to hear the Oakes girl abused, he said. But he made the others hear a good deal of abuse of Delville, that renegade adherent of the House of Oakes, and Wilton’s abuse was rich in colour. Delville yawned and was silent.

‘ I say, shall we all have to see them ?’ Keddy asked.

Delville laughed. The anxious repugnance of Keddy’s

tone was so strange an accompaniment to this visit to the shades of pleasure. It was just these touches of humour that made vice worth Delville's while.

'Compulsory amusements we left behind us at school,' he said. 'Is there a waiting-room for Keddy and me?' he asked Wilton.

'There's a dining-room downstairs,' said Wilton shortly.

Then, as he walked with the other two into the dowdy dullness of Angel Square, Keddy knew that something had happened to him. A spring had broken inside him. A chill struck on his senses. The tide of pleasure had turned.

'I say, Bobby, you'd much better not go,' he said, and deep within him began the first stirring of alarm. 'It's such an extraordinary time to go and see them.'

'Oh, it's all right; you leave it to me,' said Wilton.

Keddy jerked back his head like a horse. 'I don't want to go there,' he said sulkily, and at once he found upon him the dangerous gaze of Vitality.

At that moment, surely, Mr. Carpenter turned in his bed. He and his principles were very near to a victory. Keddy slackened the pace of his walk; his sulky look became more marked. The clouds of ancient prejudice swept up across the wider view, and uncle, mother, Pollock, Carpenter, held up the new bogie of the woman.

'Look, there's their light,' said Wilton, pointing up. 'They're eccentric. They never go to bed till two.'

Keddy looked at the lighted window distastefully. 'I'm not going in there,' he said.

Wilton took his arm as they walked along.

'I'm not going in, really,' said Keddy

He was, after all, the only man in Oxford whom Wilton cared for in these days. To him it was a question of allegiance. He turned his eyes on Keddy again; his arm gave a jerking pressure.

'They're all *right*, you know, Keddy,' he said. 'You needn't look like that. These girls are respectable enough. Yes, damn them! they are.'

'Are they really, Bobby?'

'You fool! Of course they are.'

He released his arm ; lightly and silently he threw open the window of the downstairs room ; noiselessly he climbed in. And Keddy had to make his choice between desertion of Vitality and acceptance of the women, who were, put it at the worst, respectable. He chose the women.

Standing with Delville in the dark room, he heard how Wilton met the women and how they met Wilton. He heard their exaggerated surprise and orthodox disapprobation. He heard them refuse to let him go to the drawing-room upstairs. Then came Wilton's mocking expostulation, the yielding of the women, promises of early departure, scolding, pleasant laughter, and silence.

'Here we are, then,' said Keddy, looking round him.

'Here we are,' said Delville. He dropped into an arm-chair, yawned, and chuckled placidly for some moments.

'It's worth while, Keddy, isn't it ?' he said.

Keddy did not understand.

'My dear fellow, do you realize that Bobby takes this business as seriously as if he were a boy of fifteen ? Haven't you perceived that he really thinks he's being wicked ? He is an awfully nice fellow, but I tell you, since he took to being wicked, the strain on my gravity has been something more than I can bear. And if I laughed, my word ! he'd half kill me. But do think—do *think* of him upstairs in that drawing-room now !'

Such was the expert view of Wilton's conduct. But Keddy wondered at it. Delville, with chuckles lingering in his throat, was falling asleep.

'He does it so—so conscientiously,' he said, with his eyes closed.

'Wake me up when he comes down. He won't be long. And he'll be in a damned bad temper.'

Then Delville slept. Keddy spoke to him ; the only answer was a grunt. He shut the window, drew the blind down, and spent the first moments of his ample leisure in examining the room as seen in the diffused light of the lamp across the street. He looked at the dingy horsehair furniture, the gilt-framed mirror over the fire, the great pictures by which lodging-house keepers commemorate their dead. He gazed at the fan in the grate,

the antimacassars on the chairs, the china figures on the mantelpiece. He fingered the greasy tablecloth, felt the crumbly surface of the sideboard, and in each quarter of the room smelt the smell that belonged thereto. And he formed, slowly and steadily, a lasting mental association. For ever and ever he would connect the squalor of Angel Square with the breezy freshness of the wider moral view.

Great drops of rain sounded in the street outside. Keddy was tired, and he looked long at the round-backed armchair with an obviously springless seat that offered a resting-place to someone—surely not to Keddy. He seemed to see in that chair an old and agonized woman dying of a hideous complaint in a stuffy room, and a most unchristian repugnance assailed him. It should not be that chair. He brought a cane one from a corner, comforted to think the dust of ages would not rise from this. He sat, and was too unhappy to cross his legs. Were the women like the house they stayed in? He remembered that Oxford was full; decent lodgings were snapped up, and perhaps the upstairs room was better.

Then he was cold, turned up the collar of his coat, and saw a brown rug spread upon the sofa. It was crumpled where last sat upon, and it was better to be cold than to wrap oneself in that. Again his idle finger wandered to the rent in his trousers, while Delville breathed heavily, and the sound of three voices continued from the room upstairs.

Here was once more the old conflict between morals and æsthetics. The wider view saw nothing wrong in Angel Square, nor in women guaranteed respectable. Women, as Delville had insisted, were an alien and unnatural element in the practice of climbing, but there was nothing in the wider view that could condemn their introduction. Yet Keddy was sickened—sickened as he had been when Pollock and Curly cast out Wilton from society, sickened as he had been when, years ago, he saw a drunken navvy strike his wife. He tried to remember that adventures were delightful, that proctors and policemen were made by an all-wise Providence to supply

unspeakable thrills of excitement and joy. But his mind wandered off to his own bed and was cheered, to Mr. Carpenter, and was sad.

The weary time dragged on ; the rain continued ; and Keddy longed to wake Delville and hear that kindly, if ever flippant, voice. But to do so would be inhuman as well as useless.

He was hungry. A cake had been left on the sideboard. But someone had picked out the cherries with a buttery knife that had a greasy handle, and Keddy remained hungry. He paced the room for warmth. His foot struck something in a corner—a spittoon—and surely the ebbing tide of unhappiness had reached its lowest point. He had not even heart enough for smoking. Again he sat down and waited.

One does not take a watch out climbing, and it seemed to Keddy that an hour and a half must have passed before Wilton at last, unheralded by any sound of laughter or farewell, came back into the downstairs room. Keddy lost not a moment in waking Delville.

‘ Shall we go now ? ’ he said to Wilton.

In Wilton, too, it seemed that the tide of pleasure had turned. ‘ Go ? Good God ! yes. What else are we likely to do ? ’ he said, walking swiftly to the window. Delville shook himself and looked with suppressed amusement at Wilton. Keddy pawed the ground.

Wilton lifted the blind and peered into the square outside.

‘ Blast ! ’ he muttered, turning away. ‘ There’s no luck anywhere to-night.’

‘ I told you so,’ said Delville enigmatically.

‘ What is it ? ’ Keddy asked.

‘ A copper bang under the lamp. We’ll have to wait. And that cursed girl stuck to us like a leech upstairs all the time. Damn her impudence ! Everything’s wrong to-night.’

Without a word Delville went back to his chair and his sleep.

Thus at last the intoxicating climax of the chase had come. This was the policeman whose possible appear-

ance round street corners had made young blood to bound. It was the expectation of this great moment that had made Keddy's fists to tingle. He turned back to his cane chair, and Wilton dropped exhausted on the sofa. There was not a sound except the steady falling of the rain.

The situation did not become less dismal when Keddy found that Wilton as well as Delville was asleep. Several times in ten minutes he peeped below the blind and saw the policeman still waiting. The house was watched. They were in a trap. There was danger without, but there was no romance within.

He went to Wilton to wake him. He shook him. Grunting, mumbling, as he lay on his back, Wilton turned over and lay on his side, and his face was against the dirty rug on which the inhabitant of the room had sat. A spasm of disgust, and even of hopelessness, made Keddy seize him by the neck and drag him to his feet. Squalor was going further than his nerves could tolerate.

The evening had four phases, with a solid, unmistakable event that changed each one into the next. The first had been adventure and delight. Then came the women, and turned adventure into wretchedness. And now the spell of Wilton made wretchedness give way to something better. He stretched himself, yawned, pulled himself together. He looked for the policeman, and muttered curses at his waiting. He roused Delville. He led the way out of the room and up the stairs. To Keddy he gave the best he had, an angry announcement that they would stay no longer in this confounded trap. He explained his plans. He stood at the open window of an empty bedroom at the back of the house upstairs. He showed the geography of the back garden, the route along the walls. He consigned the police force to hell. He knelt on the window-sill and reached for the neighbouring drain-pipe. He stretched his arm; he leant his weight. Beneath him the projecting box of geraniums gave way, and he, the box, the earth, the flowers, were on the stones of the back yard twenty feet below.

This might be distressing, but it was not dull. Keddy



stayed to ask no questions. He found the drain-pipe and descended, with the heels of Delville following close upon his head. There is an orthodox manner of behaviour after such accidents as this. Someone bends down and asks, 'Are you hurt?' The other stands anxiously by. 'No; it's all right,' says the victim. 'Can you stand up?' the sympathizer asks, offering a hand, and from that they fall to commenting sagaciously on an escape so providential. But none of this occurred in the back-yard of the lodging-house. Delville, with nothing but a passing look at Wilton, dragged a tub to the wall. 'Bring him here,' he said in a loud whisper. 'We'll have the whole household looking out of the windows in another minute. Quick!'

Keddy lifted Wilton from his sitting posture, and wasted no time on inquiries. Neat things like Wilton fall neatly, and there were no broken bones. But it was a man of wood that Keddy and Delville had to manage—a figure with substance but no motion, obedient to each shove and command. He remained in each position where they put him, inert and dazed. He was dragged to the wall. Held from behind, he walked along unsteadily.

How they fared, how they lay hid in a neighbouring garden from the alarmed and indignant household; how they crawled on outhouse roofs and dragged over walls and gates; how they planned and discussed, and even laughed; the route that they took; the traces that they left; the chances that made for their safety—all these are told in the great unwritten chronicle that rolls on by winter firelight in the inner brotherhood of Delville and the rest. 'I lifted him up to Keddy,' Delville described it, 'at the most critical moment of the whole business, right on the top of the wall by Williamson's window, and Keddy in an awful voice said, "Not yet. Take him down." I thought he had seen Williamson looking out. And then he explained that he was very sorry, but he had wanted to sneeze. And, damn it! he never sneezed after all.'

Keddy, in his turn, would tell how his gravity was con-

stantly upset by Delville's habit of alluding to Wilton as 'it,' as though he were a corpse. The recollection of Wilton himself went only so far as those moments of crisis when Keddy pinched his arm and shook him and stirred him into consciousness. 'Bobby, wake up, there's a good chap! You *must* hold on to this while I get round you.'

The dawn came—the early summer dawn, and the rain continued. The work was strenuous, and there was neither exhilaration nor regret, but only the concentration of practical faculties. The thing had to be done, and that was quite enough to think about.

'One more river, one more river to cross,' said Delville at last, standing in the precincts of the college that bordered on their own. 'Up you go.'

'Can you shove him up to where I am?' Keddy asked, leaning from the fork of a sloping tree.

'No; you must pull him too.'

So Delville pushed and Keddy pulled. 'Bobby,' he said in an imperious whisper, rapping his knuckles on his head—'Bobby, you must wake up now. Here, hold on to that branch.' And adroitly he managed to creep up the tree so that Wilton landed in the fork where he had been.

Then to the top of the adjoining wall, along which ran a line of revolving spikes well covered with ivy. With all due caution he raised, first his head, then his body, to inspect the safety of the other side. Gaining a foothold below and between the spikes he stood and surveyed, characteristically unhurried, his hands in his pockets. In the grey light he saw the quad and the dreary rain, the grass plot where he and Pollock walked and talked philosophy. But it was not a time for sentimental rumination, though never so strange and sad a change had come over the homely place. Keddy sucked his lips, looked this way and that, and calculated the safety and secrecy of their advance.

Suddenly his head was still, fixed in a certain quarter. He turned, caught the branch of the tree, and swung down silently past Wilton to the ground.

'Get him down,' he said.

'What's wrong?' Delville asked.

'Get him down. It's Porker—standing about in the quad.'

'That man's perseverance,' said Delville, 'is beyond praise.'

Nevertheless, it was an inconvenience. They brought down Wilton, who subsided at once full length on his back on the grass.

'I wonder if he's really hurt,' said Keddy.

'More drink than tumble,' Delville observed.

Keddy, too, sat down on the soaking grass, and Delville leant against the tree, for committee meetings cannot always take place round green baize tables. They were in a hole, and a way must be made to escape from it. Geographically, the difficulty was not to be surmounted. Had Wilton possessed mobility, there might have been other ways of entering the college where Colquhoun could have been eluded. They might have gone by another route. They might have hauled him up to a first-floor window. But their eyes rested on the thing that lay between them, and they knew that there was no way possible but this one. It came to this, that if they could not get out of Colquhoun's way, then Colquhoun must be got out of theirs.

And to whom could they apply for help? Not more than seven or eight bedrooms looked out on the college where they were, and only the men in those bedrooms could they hope to rouse.

'There is,' said Keddy gravely, 'Arthur.'

'And on the whole,' Delville answered, 'I would rather accept Porker's tender mercies than Arthur Pollock's.'

'That's damned silly,' said Keddy quietly.

First, with commendable prudence, they ascertained that Colquhoun still waited. Then, leaving Wilton where he lay, they left their secluded corner and made their way round to that part of the quadrangle on which the buildings of their own college faced. They picked up pebbles from the gravel on the paths. What they were about to do was neither pleasant nor altogether safe, and

each of them had reasons for regretting the necessity of an appeal to Pollock's mercy.

Their little stones flew upwards to the bedroom on the second floor, rattled, missed, succeeded, and fell.

'Oh, Keddy, the sleep of perfect innocence is deep,' said Delville, and it seemed that the noise would waken all the staircase.

'Stop it; we can't make this row,' he decided. 'We must wake this fellow on the ground floor and send him up to Pollock.'

'It's Robinson,' said Keddy. 'We can't.'

He leant back and threw his biggest stone with faultless aim, but Delville went and called through the bars of the open ground-floor window.

'Oh, *don't* do that,' Keddy commanded, with a sudden access of impatience. 'Joseph, look here, you're not to!'

It happened that the thought of Robinson brought up a whole army of new fears and disgusts in Keddy's wearied mind. There was good cause. The man was a Tathamite friend of Mr. Carpenter, a devoted busybody of St. Saviour's House. But the mischief was done.

'Who's that?' said Pollock from his window above.

'Who's that?' said Robinson from below.

'Oh, damn!' said Keddy in extreme annoyance.

'Is that you, Keddy?' Pollock called down.

'Why, it's Forth,' said the astonished Robinson.

And so, the error being past repair, Pollock was ordered down to the ground-floor room, the better to receive instructions.

Meanwhile, 'Why, what ever are you doing? Do you know it's past three? How did you get out there? I couldn't imagine what the noise was. I never dreamt of its being you. You must be soaked. Wherever have you been?'

Thus, through the window-bars, Robinson chatted in sustained amazement, looking very stuffy. Nothing could have been less friendly than Keddy's brief answers. There was only his impatience to relieve his sulkiness.

'Why, your hand's all covered with blood!'

Keddy looked at the spike-torn hand and put it in his pocket, saying nothing.

'Fancy my meeting you at lunch with Carpenter yesterday, and then meeting you like this!' said Robinson amid giggles.

But Keddy saw nothing funny in that.

'What in the world have you been doing?'

'We've been with some girls in Angel Square,' said Delville promptly, and he would in any case have said it, true or false, for the mere pleasure of seeing Robinson scandalized. While Robinson, perhaps, would have been acute enough to disbelieve it had it not been for Keddy's furious glance at Delville.

Pollock, in an overcoat, arrived in Robinson's bedroom. In his manner was all the pitiless efficiency that marks the ideal nurse. He was there to cure a situation, not to sympathize.

They told him the brief facts, and for the most part he gave his attention to Delville alone.

'They've been with—er—women, in Angel Square,' said Robinson. His impassive tone could not hide the appeal for stern justice which his words implied. Again the angry stare of Keddy set the seal of truth upon it. But Pollock, like Gallio, cared for none of these things just yet.

'Go back to the wall,' he said coldly to Delville, 'and wait till you see I've got Porker away. Then get Wilton over and disappear as soon as you can.'

'How will you get Porker away?' asked Robinson with hot interest.

But no one noticed Robinson. Pollock through the door, Keddy and Delville across the grass, went each to the work appointed.

It was the last phase, and it was the most bitter. It brought an emotion that clung round Keddy like his miserable dripping clothes, that smarted like the spike-wounds in his legs and hands. It made him hang his head. He kicked loose stones before him on the gravel as he strode along, and cared not if the whole of Oxford saw him in the growing light. What would it matter,

now that his doings had been told to Arthur, and would be told to Mr. Carpenter to-morrow? Surely, thought Keddy in the bitterness of his disgust, as the squalor of Angel Square had seemed to him, so would he seem to Mr. Carpenter and Arthur.

The lifeless figure of Wilton lay as they had left it, with little to mark it as the handsomest thing in the college. Delville was watchman this time, and Keddy sat on the ground beside his charge.

Hurriedly, at Delville's signal, he lifted Wilton, and up the tree and over the spikes they hauled and guided him together. They took him to his room by the side of the hall. 'Will you put him to bed?' said Delville. 'I tell you honestly I can't move another muscle.'

Thus deserted, Keddy was doing the melancholy last offices of friendship when Arthur Pollock joined him. For a long time without speaking Pollock looked at the grimy, pallid, dank, and soaking figure, whose torn clothes Keddy slowly unfastened and removed. He came up to help. Something in his face made Keddy wave his hand over Wilton's body, saying, 'He's all right. He only wants sleep and a bath. It'll wash off.'

'No it won't,' said Pollock. And then for the only time that night his voice was kindly. 'Keddy, don't you see? He's getting dirty with the dirt that doesn't wash off.'

'Look here, you don't understand,' said Keddy, standing upright and looking straight at Pollock. 'Those women to-night were all right. You're making a mistake.'

'Women! Good Lord! I'm not thinking of women,' Pollock answered. 'It's Delville, Keddy. It's the sordid life. It's the mark of Ishmael.'

'I think I'll wash his face,' said Keddy last of all.

'Oh, leave him alone and come away.'

'No; I think I'll wash his face.'

Pollock waited impatiently. Indeed, he had no reason for waiting at all.

As they walked away Keddy asked about Colquhoun. How had Arthur got him away? It seemed only decent to ask the question.

'Oh, it doesn't matter how I did it,' Pollock told him.  
'I discovered the proper lie to tell.'

'It was awfully good of you to do it, Arthur.'

To that there was no answer.

'I say, you do understand about to-night? There's no harm in those women. Bobby told me so. I wouldn't have gone there if he hadn't.'

They were at Keddy's staircase. 'Oh, for God's sake, don't trouble yourself with explanations,' said Pollock.

'But I want to tell you,' said the unhappy Keddy.  
'Come up with me while I go to bed.'

Pollock shook himself and turned away.

'No, thank you. I'm cold enough already. Good-night.'

One thing there remained to do amid this wreckage.

Though, as he dragged up the staircase, Keddy's head was beating with the mastering idea of sleep, sleep, sleep, his unhappiness was still able to make one further task worth while. He sat down at his table and kept his head from falling forward. On a piece of paper he wrote swiftly, without a pause :

'DEAR MR. CARPENTER,

'I expect they will tell you that I climbed out of college with some men to-night. We went to a house where there are some women from London. If the women had not been all right I would not have gone. I want you to hear this straight from me before you hear it from anyone else. As we were not discovered, you will remember not to tell it to people who don't know.

'Yours sincerely,

'MALCOLM FORTH.'

That, fastened and addressed, was left for the man to send first thing in the morning. And then, with food, drink, a little water, and with freedom from wet clothes, came bed. The succeeding phases of a memorable night were closed. Exhilaration, squalor, struggle, and shame, were swallowed up in such sleep as comes to tiredness in the twentieth year of life.

## CHAPTER VII

### APPEALS TO PHILIP SOBER

THE rain worked itself out, as it always should, before mankind got up in the morning, and over a steaming earth the May sun shone for those who awoke to the outcome of the wider moral view. It shone when Keddy perceived the man pouring water in his bath, and determinedly dug into his pillow a nose that would not sniff the freshness of Nature as yet. It shone encouragement on Bobby Wilton, in whom cold water and breakfast made all the change that Keddy had prophesied. It shone when Pollock left his bed at that magic hour which is not so early as to imply a middle-class regularity nor so late as to brand one as a sluggard. And it taxed the warmth of the sunshine to do its work on Pollock. He dressed himself, and his lips tightened ominously. He breakfasted, and, like a well-conducted citizen, he read his paper honestly. At ten o'clock activity began, and as he walked across the quad to Keddy's room, there was no customary discontent upon his face. To tell the grim truth, he was pleased; he was happy, and a swing was in his walk. He had the look that one sees in the faces of the stalwart farmers in the picture-books who cross the orchard, stick in hand, to where the little heedless boys surround the favourite apple-tree.

Breakfast was long cold in Keddy's room, and in the bedroom a figure under the blankets, a little hair above them, made Pollock pause. Sleep, after all, is healthy, and not a thing for well-wishers to destroy. Pollock looked around him. Prudence, as in Wilton's room, had



hidden all the traces of the climbing escapade, the torn trousers, the wet coat, the dirty water of the final wash. Still hesitating, Pollock spied a small brown book on a shelf, and by a suspicion that proved correct, he was moved to take it and examine it. It was, as he had thought, a book of daily religious readings for the year. It dated from the time of confirmation, a mother's present, and its grubby pages showed the faithful use that was made of it. Not in this or any other devotional work could Pollock look for long without chancing on a phrase so repellant as to make him drop the book like a hot coal. The writers of such works seem doomed to constant lapses, both from philosophic soundness and from balanced moderation. Pollock put it down. 'He didn't read that last night,' he said grimly.

Then he spoke Keddy's name and repeated it till the waking was effected. The bedclothes shifted, a face appeared, and in the blue of the eyes that vacant solemnity which comes with returning consciousness.

'Hullo, Arthur !' Keddy began, and after consciousness came conscience, and a solemnity that was not vacant at all.

To some people it is given to be angry without being absurd. So gifted was Pollock. He was tall ; his mien was impressive ; and in Keddy's bedroom he had the advantage which a risen and well-fed man must have over one just awakened.

'Well, I hope you're proud of yourself,' he began in bitter tones, and he paused for an answer that did not come. He strode up and down the room.

'I want to know how far this infernal folly is going.'

'Well——' said Keddy, and then stopped. The question was much too comprehensive to be answered straight off.

'I suppose,' said Pollock, 'I'd better go and ask Bobby. I suppose it rests entirely with him, and not with you.'

Keddy could have answered that easily, but he did not choose to do so. He lay still and watched.

The speech for the prosecution was impassioned. Here was Keddy, the son of the most excellent man and

woman in the world, and there was no advantage that fortune had not pressed upon him. Money, popularity, health, and wits, were his. Every virtuous pleasure was open to him, and half the vicious ones. There was no one in the college, no one in Oxford, to whom all men had offered so warm and unconditional a welcome. What did he do ? Day by day and stage by stage he let himself be sucked towards the cesspool of University life, to share their filth with vermin driven from the haunts of decent men. First Bobby, then Bobby's chosen friends, then Angel Square, and God knew what would be the next. It was wilful, wanton folly ; it was suicide ; it was the act of a giddy fool. Like a spoilt schoolboy, like a silly young fool who tries to be a fine young devil, was Keddy. He was not only like it ; he was the thing itself. And if Pollock was guilty of hitting a man when he was down, it must be remembered that all is fair in love and war and moral reformation.

'I say, Arthur, it's not so bad as all that ; you know it isn't,' said Keddy, who had not hitherto broken in upon the declamation.

Pollock was bitterly satirical. 'Oh, you needn't call it bad unless you like. Will it be bad when people ask, "Who is Forth ?" and they say, "Oh, he's the man who goes about with Delville ; he's the man who manages Wilton's women for him ; he belongs to that jolly gang who come to Oxford for the fun of disgracing it ; one of the sportsmen who go in for vice, not because it's pleasant, but because it's vicious" ?'

'Oh, well, if you're going to be stupid——' said Keddy, turning himself in bed.

Pollock looked and saw that obstinacy had taken the place of attentiveness. Another moment, and Keddy was examining with interest the cut on his hand.

'Keddy.'

'Well, what is it ?'

Pollock sat down on his bed. The wrath of the moral reformer was weakened with a note of pleading.

'Don't you see ? You've made a tremendous success

in Oxford. You found your way straight into the very best lot of people in the college, and now you're risking it all for the sake of these beasts. You can't be in both camps at once. It's serving God and mammon.'

'I don't mind agreeing that Delville is mammon,' said Keddy, 'and Curly may be God, but you *won't* understand that I don't mean to serve either.'

'Oh, do try to grasp the position,' Pollock pleaded, and the last of his anger went from him. 'You simply can't keep in touch with the decent men and with Delville's lot at the same time. You might as well hope to go every day to luncheon at the Vatican and dinner at the Quirinal.'

'I bet you anything you like,' said Keddy slowly, 'I could explain the whole thing to Curly and Tremayne in five minutes. Now, I've done something vulgar.'

For Pollock's face twitched in the familiar way, but it was not at vulgarity this time.

'You're never vulgar,' he sighed; 'you're only mad.' And the madness of Keddy ploughed another furrow on the brow that already reflected quite enough of this world's perversity.

Reason is only for reasonable people and here was a case in which argument was useless. What was the basis of this wild self-confidence? Ignorance of the world, perhaps, in part; but there was something worse than ignorance. Between social salvation and social damnation it seemed that Keddy had struck a perfect balance, and did not care whether he was found in one scale or the other.

Pollock gazed round the room despairingly, as do men of more common clay when arguments have given out. It is an expedient used as readily in a bedroom as by a lawyer amid his books. To the low round bath, the sponge, the towels, he appealed in vain. Even his own photograph upon the chest of drawers suggested only those claims of old friendship that he was too proud to make.

'Keddy,' he said suddenly, an inspiration seizing him, 'I am going to say something so *banal* that you're the only *man* I could say it to.'

It was the little brown book that had suggested it.

'Never mind,' said Keddy, with the beginnings of a smile; 'there's whisky in the next room.'

'Look here: you climbed out to Angel Square last night; would you like your mother to know about it?'

The effect on Keddy was immediate. He performed another wriggle in bed till his position was a perfect one for interested attention, and all proceeded briskly.

'You're going for those women again. They were decent women; I told you last night.'

'I don't care a damn,' said Pollock. 'They're Bobby's women, and that's enough for me.'

There, Keddy knew it. If they had been Curly's women, it would be a different thing.

'Because,' said Pollock, unabashed, 'if men like Curly go off the lines now and then, it's only an incident, and they're none the worse. With Delville's gang it's a consistent policy of sin for sin's sake.'

'Look here, Arthur: I'm sick of saying that I wouldn't have gone there at all unless I'd known it was all right.'

And Pollock was sick of saying that, women or no women, it was not all right. Where was it to stop? Why not chuck these fellows once for all? It would have been very convenient then if Pollock's nice taste had allowed him to speak of pitch and contamination.

But Keddy would not chuck them. They had been kind to him. He could not do it. That was a very fine attitude indeed, said Pollock, if only it were backed by common-sense. In this case the idea of loyalty was a mere inflated absurdity. Were these men more happy with Keddy than without him? Would Delville break his heart at Keddy's desertion? It was nonsense. They did not want him.

'But Bobby does,' said Keddy.

'Why? He's too far gone now for you to pull him back.'

'He does,' said Keddy.

'Nonsense!'

'He does. I can't explain exactly why. But I know he does. I can't chuck Bobby.'

‘Then Bobby I give you,’ Pollock declared. ‘The other men you must chuck. You must chuck Angel Square.’

Away in the depths of the sunbeam that came through the door from the other room was the resting-place of Keddy’s eyes while he listened to those terms. The sunbeam was clean. His glance fell to the cold water in the bath. It was clean too. Through the open window the breeze from the west came to his nostrils, and was clean. He looked again at the friend who had held out clean proposals. It was common-sense that Pollock was talking now. ‘You must give up Angel Square,’ he said; and all the sordid memories of last night broke out in gratitude to the hand that opened a way of escape. Keddy promised to give up Angel Square.

‘And Delville’s gang?’

‘I can’t be their enemy,’ he said slowly.

‘But you will stop climbing with them?’

There was no resisting the sunlight from the other room. Keddy murmured a long-drawn ‘Yes.’

‘And the women? You’ll never have anything to do with Bobby’s women?’

‘Yes’—with enthusiasm, ‘Yes,’ said Keddy; ‘that’s our treaty. That’s where we’ll draw the line. I’m awfully glad we’ve done it. I see my way clear now. I’ve got a defined position.’

It was very satisfactory, very, and Keddy began to think of breakfast.

‘Do you hear that?’ he said a moment later.

Someone, cheered by the sunshine without, was whistling the Boating Song as he came upstairs.

‘That’s Bobby,’ he said; and he waited, Keddy-like, to see the effect of his announcement.

One of the advantages of civilization is that enemies may be expected to keep on their gloves in the presence of third persons. Pollock and Wilton were both civilized, and each had reason to behave with decency. Pollock had won a victory; allowance for Wilton was a term in the treaty, and quickly he decided that honour bound him to stay a moment for form’s sake, and then to leave the other two together. Wilton, for his part, could well

be generous just now. They had seen him last night, and they could see him now—Keddy the friend, and Pollock the foe. His forehead was bruised ; that was all. Without spot or pucker on his face, with the dark blood in his cheeks and the clear white in his eyes, his face as fresh as his body was slim, his power of recuperation struck Pollock like a personal affront. As between the two of them, it was distinctly Wilton's moment.

'Hullo, Arthur!' said he, 'I don't know exactly whether it's my life or my liberty I owe to you, but Delville tells me it's something I ought to be damned grateful for, and I'm sure I am.'

He went and cocked himself on the dressing-table, and swung his leg. There had never yet been a situation that Wilton could not carry off, thought Keddy.

'Oh, we're all allies where Porker is concerned,' said Pollock pleasantly enough.

'Arthur's not such a bad chap, is he, Keddy? He's not half such a prig as he tries to be.' And Wilton put his head on one side the better to study the object of his comments. All might have gone splendidly had they responded to his light tone.

'Has Keddy had his smacking? Has he promised never, never to do it again?' he asked.

But they were hardly in the mood to appreciate this particular pleasantry. There was another unfortunate pause.

'Or perhaps he's to be reported to Curly,' the scoffer continued, his good-humour on the ebb; 'Curly will do the smacking better than you, Arthur.'

Pollock forced a laugh, and got up from the bed in preparation for departure.

'Now, you can't run away without striking a blow for the honour of the college,' said Wilton. 'Besides,' he added, 'you needn't go. I'm going myself.'

He told Keddy to get dressed and come and sit in the quad. He wanted to talk to him. They would talk in whispers so as to corrupt no one. He got off the table. He slapped Pollock's back. 'Poor old Arthur! Another nervous breakdown!' And he went.

‘Arthur, he’s not always like that,’ said Keddy.

Pollock shrugged his shoulders. ‘That’s what he learns from Delville. I told you ; he can wash off all the other dirt. He can’t wash off that.’

So a period of unhappiness came down on Keddy as Pollock went away, but it was a short one. He dressed himself, and ate his cold breakfast, and never thought that the wounds of last night could heal so quickly. Such is the magic of the confessional. By Arthur he was forgiven ; to Arthur and to Mr. Carpenter he had given pledges, had defined his position. His feet had touched the line of boundary, the last point he would have to journey towards the place of darkness. He knew the worst, had gone farther than he would ever have to go again. He had seen the sordid life, and come back uncontaminated, unentangled, unimpaired.

Down the staircase, out into the brilliant morning, he went in the new comfort of his position, a man armed at all points against the darts of Pharisee and Publican alike. He did not stop to think if the fountain of his joy were his treaty with Pollock or the glory of the day. It was all one in him. He went to the seat where Wilton sat, where the sunlight was lost in his dark flannel clothes, and enjoyed itself on the smooth blackness of his hair.

‘Well, Keddy, you played up pretty well last night. Delville has told me all about it.’

Keddy was pleased, and waited for more of the same kind, which might be easier to answer. He sat down on the seat, and was comfortable. Wilton was very different when you got him alone.

‘Was Arthur awfully sick with you ?’ he was asked. ‘They’ll go on trying to make you a prig like themselves till they see it’s no use.’

Keddy laughed. The Publican, he thought, showed far more confidence in him than did the Pharisee. Yet he wished that Wilton would not say things like that.

There was, of course, a great deal to talk about. Talking with Wilton was not as it was with Arthur, where you hurried through the necessary facts, and lingered till all was blue in the ideas they suggested.

You had, with Wilton, to treat the facts in solemn earnest. The whole story of last night, from the fall to the end, over roofs and walls, and through dangers and excitements, Keddy had to describe with every detail true and vivid. He had to pause at special places, repeat himself, and wait while Wilton enjoyed the picture called up. Then on he went again, while Wilton crossed his legs and jerked his foot up and down in excited appreciation. What cursed bad luck he had not been awake enough to know what was going on !

The side issues were treated later—Delville's indolent amusement, Porker's malignant pertinacity. And it was from this topic that trouble came. For Wilton, in his resentment, would have liked to set a trap for Porker, set him hunting a mare's nest, and let him blunder into a ludicrous position. It was the regular way to treat such interfering busybodies.

It occurred to Keddy to suggest that Porker should be given the scent of Angel Square. Let him hunt Bobby there ; let him think he had caught him at last ; let him learn with bitter disappointment what Keddy had learned with relief, that the women were perfectly respectable.

Wilton put his elbow on the back of the seat, and looked at Keddy in enjoyable amusement.

'My dear Keddy !'

'Well, if you want a smack at Porker, why not that ?'

'You are perfectly delightful,' said Wilton ; and Keddy began to look obstinate. 'But, you see, there are two objections. First, Porker might see me walking about with Gertrude Oakes all day long without getting the least bit excited. You've got an idea that she's a kind of Angel Square housemaid out for a holiday, but, as a matter of fact, she's probably the best-dressed woman in Oxford, and the best-looking too. And, secondly, you know, if Porker did go sniffing round her, well, the plan wouldn't exactly work.'

'I don't a bit see why,' said Keddy.

Wilton laughed at him, kindly enough.

'You know what Porker's like,' Keddy continued. 'He'll find the woman, think he's really caught you, make



a fearful fuss, and then you can prove that she's absolutely all right, and Porker will be wild enough to—to bite his nails right off, you know, all of them that's left.'

'Too difficult, Keddy—too difficult. If you're going to play that game, you want the genuine article, a real Diana, not Gertrude. It would be different if Gertrude were as fresh as her complexion.'

'Oh, and she isn't, then,' said Keddy.

'No, not exactly. She has a past, my dear Keddy. Ask Delville.'

'Last night you told me she was.'

'Oh, you never believed me.'

There was a pause, while the clouds of sulkiness were gathering. Keddy bent forward and picked a bit of grass.

'When I got back to my room last night,' he said with deliberation, 'I wrote to Carpenter and told him I had climbed out to Angel Square, and I said I wouldn't have gone into the house if the women hadn't been all right. That sort of thing makes a lot of difference to Carpenter.'

Wilton, as he looked at Keddy, was puzzled.

'Well?' he said.

'Well, there it is,' said Keddy. 'I believed you, and now it's done.'

Wilton had never seen him as sulky as this. 'That sort of thing makes a lot of difference to a man like Carpenter.'

'Very likely,' he agreed; 'but I don't see why that makes any difference to you.'

'Well, it does,' said Keddy. 'That's all.'

This disclosure might not affect the treaty with Pollock. It left the position still defined. But Keddy had been cheated, which no man likes. He had been tricked into telling Carpenter something that was not true, and now he must either let Carpenter go on believing a lie, or he must say what would make him seem rather a fool and Bobby rather a blackguard. The alternatives were uncomfortable. A dull resentment came over him. He picked to small pieces the bit of grass in his hand. He looked up, and across the length of the quadrangle he

saw the figure of a man in a long black coat and shovel hat—a man who walked on business intent, whose head was fixed. It was Mr. Carpenter.

‘I must go,’ he said, and whether it was to meet the clergyman or to avoid him, he hardly knew.

But Wilton caught his shoulder. Wilton had been watching him much too closely, much too thoughtfully, to have seen the advance of Mr. Carpenter. He detained him.

‘Keddy—when I took you to Angel Square—I was a beast and a cur and an ungrateful blackguard. I confess it. Will that do?’

For this even Mr. Carpenter had to wait. Wilton was very handsome. The least approach to tenderness sat well on his face. Keddy had not seen this particular look before, and it affected him in quite a new way. Wilton was making another picture, a thing that had happened before. What had not happened before was that Keddy was touched.

‘It’s all my fault for living in such a muddle,’ he said.

‘Never mind that. Are you going to forgive me?’

But the very idea of forgiveness seemed absurdly grandiose. There was nothing for it but laughter, and ‘Don’t be a fool, Bobby.’

Then, ‘God in heaven!’ Wilton exclaimed, ‘here’s Carpenter!’

‘Yes, I know, I must go and meet him,’ said Keddy.

For Mr. Carpenter, guided by that instinct which comes to men at times of mortal crisis, had spotted the pair as they sat in the corner of the grass plot. It was about five minutes since he had found Keddy’s note lying on the table in the hall at St. Saviour’s House, and he was now a little out of breath. Yet across the grass he came with rapid steps. He turned neither to the right nor to the left, and his coat-tails flapped behind him. And even at a time like this, when every moment was of dire importance, when Perseus-like he saw his Andromeda in the very clutches of the monster, even then did this dark-coated champion keep his head cool and his face unruffled.

‘How do you do, Mr. Carpenter,’ said Wilton, who

came with Keddy to meet him ; and Mr. Carpenter did not flinch before one of the very straightest shafts of those dangerous blue eyes.

‘It’s Wilton,’ he said cheerily, and took his hand with every mark of kindness.

‘Sitting in the quad ?’ he said. ‘Well, that’s the way to spend a morning like this, isn’t it ? It’s good to be alive on such a day. And, after all, there’s no quad like this for sitting about in. It’s the homeliest place in Oxford.’

Mr. Carpenter mopped his high forehead, and beamed from Wilton to Keddy, from Keddy to Wilton.

‘I’m afraid,’ said Wilton, putting his hand on Keddy’s shoulder and turning him round into full view, ‘I’m afraid you find Keddy rather limp this morning. The fact is, I dragged him out climbing all over the place last night till I don’t know what hour.’

Then Keddy sickened at the development he foresaw. Just by them was one of the bowls that lie on the grass in the summer term. Upon it he planted a foot, and gently moved it to and fro. It made an excuse for not looking either at Mr. Carpenter or Wilton.

‘Yes, yes,’ Mr. Carpenter answered ; ‘he wrote and told me.’

What was coming was plain enough to Keddy, but he had no heart to stop it. In cruel loyalty, Wilton was going to corroborate the statement in his letter which had now become a lie. Such was the basis of the new defined position.

‘He thought I was taking him somewhere dreadful,’ Wilton continued, laughing lightly. ‘But I made his conscience easy on that score.’

‘Yes, yes, I understand—I understand all that,’ said Mr. Carpenter. It was obvious that he wished to be off the subject. So did Keddy, very badly. Backwards and forwards he moved the bowl under his foot, watching it idly, pouting sulky lips.

By Wilton the friendly and loyal thing had been done. If he had cheated Keddy into cheating Mr. Carpenter for Keddy’s sake he had done what he could to make the fraud successful.

‘And so,’ he said, stepping backwards, while all the grace of humour and sincerity sparkled with the sunshine on his face—‘and so—the bloom is still on the peach, Mr. Carpenter.’

There was time for Wilton to walk thirty yards away, for Mr. Carpenter to shudder, compress his lips, and have the amiable interest that a sinner always stirred in him changed quickly into a feeling of pronounced dislike before Keddy raised his eyes, though not his head, in painful apology.

‘You mustn’t mind the things Bobby says,’ he explained, having shuddered himself also at the peach and the bloom. ‘It’s only a kind of trick he’s got—now.’

Perhaps there was a natural cause for this trick, but they did not seek to discover it.

‘Now, dear old boy,’ said Mr. Carpenter, quite recovered, ‘shall we go up to your room, or walk about here?’

It mattered little to Keddy in what particular place he would have to lie to Mr. Carpenter, but the sun was still a bit of a pleasure.

‘Let’s walk about,’ he said, and his heart sank before the coming talk.

‘Then we will,’ Mr. Carpenter cheerily replied. ‘But how lucky it was I saw you! I might have gone up to your room and waited ever so long.’

‘Yes, it was lucky,’ said Keddy ruefully.

‘And your grass is still so fresh, isn’t it?’ Mr. Carpenter began again, linking his arm in Keddy’s as they walked along. ‘Later on it becomes so parched. Malcolm, I got your note this morning. It was good of you to write.’

So Mr. Carpenter acknowledged the note and by the tenor of his voice he acknowledged also the assurance it contained. He trusted Keddy, and trusted his honesty. But had Keddy seen his face when he opened the note in the hall at St. Saviour’s house, he would have known what Mr. Carpenter thought of a woman who received visitors at two in the morning, whether guaranteed respectable or not.

On the subject of the note Keddy was now absolutely

tongue-tied. Wilton had cut in and made an explanation impossible. 'When did you get it?' he asked vaguely.

'Well, I was out. I didn't find it till twelve o'clock,' said Mr. Carpenter.

As it was now a quarter past twelve, there had not been much time lost. But to Keddy that was not amusing now.

'Tell me, dear old boy,' said Mr. Carpenter, with a pressure of the arm, 'do you go out climbing often?'

Keddy had been out once or twice before, but never for such a long time as last night.

'I see, I see,' said Mr. Carpenter easily, and from end to end of Harley Street one would not find a voice more reassuring.

There was a pause.

'Well,' he resumed, laughing almost gaily, 'the world would be a dull place if we all had the same ideas of pleasure, Malcolm dear, wouldn't it? I don't think I can imagine myself on the top of a roof exactly. That dear old Presbyterian uncle of yours—what would he have said about it, I wonder?'

It seemed to Keddy that the danger zone of Wilton's lie was receding far away. The talk was not so embarrassing, after all. He was being let off much more lightly than he had expected, and the thought of the Scottish uncle amused him.

'Oh, he'd have been equal to it,' he said. 'It wouldn't have taken him long to find the passage in the Bible which just met the case. He always sandwiched his vengeance in between two chapters.'

Mr. Carpenter laughed decorously, and his eyes remained fixed on the blue sky above. So far so good, he thought. His skill was not deserting him at the pinch of this awful crisis.

'So Wilton—he was with you,' he said.

'Yes,' said Keddy.

'And some other men?'

'One other.'

Mr. Carpenter pressed his arm. They turned back down the gravel path. There was a pause.

‘Dear old boy, it isn’t everyone I trust as I trust you.’

Keddy was moody, and kicked a stone along the path. It is not always pleasant to be trusted.

‘Don’t you think, Malcolm dear,’ said Mr. Carpenter earnestly—‘don’t you think, when you want to climb, you could make it just an expedition about the walls of the college, just a journey of exploration about these roofs, you know? Just now and then, you know. We can’t have you breaking bones, of course, but I can leave that to you. But there are other dangers we know about, aren’t there, and you’d be safe from those if you stayed on the college roofs, Malcolm.’

Still Mr. Carpenter was gazing at the sky and Keddy at the ground.

‘You’re not much like the Scotch uncle,’ said Keddy.

Mr. Carpenter did not laugh. ‘Ah well, dear old boy, of course it’s a serious thing to break rules. But, then, just occasionally, you know, a little harmless fun, we mustn’t be too severe on that—just now and then. And with care, Malcolm dear. It is care that makes the difference. Ah, Malcolm, I should have been very unhappy indeed if it had not been for that sentence in your letter. That showed me you were being careful. You know, don’t you, I was always afraid, anxious, dear old boy, about your friendship with Wilton. He used to be a good deal talked about, you know. But that is all in the past now. And I trusted you—I am going to trust you still—not to be drawn into dangers, Malcolm, not to live in friendship with—with sin. That’s it, isn’t it?’

Keddy was not being let off lightly now. Almost roughly in his unhappiness he fell back on the defined position.

‘Look here, Mr. Carpenter, for all I know, I may find out all sorts of things about Bobby Wilton; but I’m not going to give him up.’

And was Mr. Carpenter baffled?

‘Give him up, dear old boy? Why, no, of course not. I know how fond you are of him. And we know what you’ve done for him, don’t we? But we may be fond of the man, Malcolm, without being fond of the things he does.’

Keddy turned and looked Mr. Carpenter in the face. 'I'm not going to climb again,' he said.

'Dear old boy, I'm so glad, so glad. It is so much better to keep free from things like that. They are terribly dangerous.'

The point unexpectedly scored was enough to console Mr. Carpenter for the rebuff concerning Wilton. But he was having a stormy morning. Again he mopped his brow.

'And you will keep from the other things Wilton may do, Malcolm? You will never take any part in the—the sad things you may find him doing?'

'I will keep out of it all,' said Keddy warmly; and Mr. Carpenter never knew that the ease of his conquest was due to Pollock's previous efforts.

'I won't have anything to do with it. I hate it. I'll refuse to touch it. I'll draw a line between Bobby and it, whatever it may be, you know.'

And so the strain relaxed, and there went up to heaven who knows what vehemence of praise and thankfulness. For, whatsoever Mr. Carpenter's hand found to do, he did it with his might, whether it was spiritual thanksgiving or the physical acknowledgements by which, with hug after hug at Keddy's arm, he set the seal on the defined position.

Towards the front quad they walked in silence, and at the porch they parted. Now was the time to call upon the wider view, and Keddy called. Back to his room he walked slowly and moodily, not looking at the men he passed. Mr. Carpenter had been sent away with a promise, and the promise should be kept. But the fact remained to Keddy's discomfort that there was something between them that could not be frankly dealt with. Wherever they talked of Wilton again, there would be something that Keddy must not tell; Wilton himself had made it impossible. And this was what Keddy did not like. It was uncomfortable; it was like having hair down your neck after a crop; it spoiled the pleasure of things. The wider view might knock down moral rules like skittles, but neither yesterday nor to-day could it make an ugly mess look nice.

He found Wilton waiting in his room, and he could not muster any great cordiality. He went to the window and looked out gloomily while Wilton watched.

‘Did you get on all right with Carpenter?’

‘Pretty well,’ said Keddy, not turning his head.

‘I backed you up. I thought I’d put in my oar about the women just to balance the boat, you know.’

Keddy drummed his knees on the desk against which he leant.

‘That was all right, wasn’t it?’ Wilton asked. ‘Or did you mean to tell Carpenter the truth and give me away to St. Saviour’s house?’

‘No, I didn’t,’ said Keddy.

‘Then why are you sick with me for backing you up?’

It was difficult to explain. Had it been Pollock instead of Wilton, Keddy could have appealed to æsthetic sensibilities and nausea, and all the rest of it. But Wilton might not understand that. Yet an explanation must be given, for explanations are of the essence of friendship.

‘If you’ve got to have a dose of castor-oil, you needn’t—lick the spoon,’ he said.

The explanation came reluctantly, and the trees in the quad were still the aim of Keddy’s eyes. From beneath his dark lashes the exile from society looked long, and was puzzled. Keddy’s allusion had a clear meaning; his mental attitude had not.

‘Keddy,’ he said suddenly, in all the swing of his imperious rudeness, ‘come away from that damned window and look at me.’

Keddy was sulky, but he obeyed.

‘Look here, you puzzle me.’

Keddy eased matters by beginning to look amused.

‘I told you I was an ungrateful beast, just now in the quad, and, well, you can apply what I said then to the Carpenter business as well as the girls. If I’d understood you, I wouldn’t have spoken to Carpenter. I’m always putting my foot in it with you. I’m damned sorry. I’ll learn not to some day.’

Keddy went red, but he was pleased.



‘And this afternoon?’ he said. ‘Let’s do something this afternoon.’

‘A punt on the Char?’

‘No, something away from everyone. Come off by train and have dinner at our place. My father’s alone. He’ll buck us up.’

Wilton was enthusiastic.

‘But,’ as Keddy remembered, suddenly despairing, ‘there’s that Oakes woman!’

Then came a very magnificent moment. Wilton declared that the Oakes woman could go to hell, or to be precise, could be turned on to Joseph Delville for the day. The expedition with Keddy would be worth a dozen of Miss Oakes. And who could have asked for a more sincere repentance? It was a triumph of virtue indeed. Keddy had no tract in his pocket, though the golden opportunity demanded it most urgently. He threw himself on the sofa, however, and laughed at Wilton in sheer pleasure. It would have needed a clever tract to do that.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ISHMAEL

It was not often that Pollock took such an extreme step as shouting. But if anything can excuse an action so full-blooded it is a friend who lives up two steep flights of stairs on a blazing summer afternoon. Up to Keddy's window from the quad, in two long syllables, his name ascended, and again, and again. But there came no answer, and Pollock turned on his heel. For a moment he looked at Wilton's window by the hall. Then he jerked himself together irritably, set his mouth, and started off in the other direction.

'Has Mr. Forth gone down to the river?' he asked of the porter at the lodge.

'Yes, sir, I think he went some time ago. He went down with Mr. Edwards, sir.'

Therefore Pollock untied the knots in his face. Across the Broad and down the Turl he carried a light heart. He was alone, and none the worse for that, though other men in twos and threes, with scraps of talk and laughter, swung on in the same direction. There was joyousness in things that afternoon. Pollock had his share in it. Keddy was safe with Edwards, to his own soul's health and Pollock's satisfaction; and now that that fact was established, the sunshine, the breeze, the sights and sounds, the ripple of life, the press of gaiety that thickened yard by yard, these things came in on Pollock's senses touched with fascination. It was the Saturday of eights week and the world was right side uppermost.

With his hands in his pockets, a straw hat shading his

appreciative eyes, he walked slowly. Down the avenue from Christ Church to the river he floated with the stream. Irregularly, some faster, some slower, flashing with colour and humming with sound, the little lines of people went onwards, before him and behind, parents, sisters, friends, beneath the tall trees, down to the second division of eights. There was enough in this to please a solitary taster of delights. Perhaps the stout lady on ahead had better not have dressed in quite that shade of purple ; stern criticism might have called it a cackle when the girl in white muslin laughed, and peace when she saw fit to stop. But not even Pollock cared to find the unattractive details. The scene was one whole, one harmony, and all the presumptions were kindly. Sisters were pretty ; their mothers were pleasing ; laughter and chatter were wit and fun ; fathers were opulent ; brothers swung finely on long legs. So much was granted, gracing each figure with the glamour of the whole. The world had come to Oxford, and Oxford had stirred itself. Here down the Long Walk through the meadow they were walking, away down the Cherwell, from shades and secret corners they were punting, down the banks their boats were drawing in, to make one gleaming concourse where the waters of the Isis by the barges are the waters of eternal youth.

So Pollock walked slowly, and was not in time to reach the barge of his own college for the race. Pleased and unexcited he watched it from the path. The second division, after all, with the small colleges that were in it, was not a very serious matter. And when it was over, as he walked down the line of the barges, as the masses of colour on the roof of each one broke and moved, as the rigidity of eager watching figures gave way to the liquid flux that laughs, congratulates, and comments on the race, the charm of the day took hold of him once more. Here was life as life should be. The black things that love not the light were hidden away in due obscurity. There was no Delville here, no devil worship, no cult of the ugly for the ugly's sake. In an everlasting eights week Pollock could have been an everlasting saint.

Saintlike he smiled at Mr. Carpenter, who stood near the barge that was his destination. He forgot the awful memory of 'but Pollock dear.'

'Are you going in to have tea?' he asked, looking at the barge.

'A difficult task in such a crowd,' said Mr. Carpenter merrily.

'Then let's wait out here for a bit. It's good enough.'

Five minutes ago the river, cleared for the race, passed clean between rich banks of colour where punts and canoes and parasols and dresses were massed in line on either side. But now the kaleidoscopic aspect was returning. The colour was in motion; bits of it set out across the shining water; it glided in and out, collided, zigzagged, crossed, and the hum of its cheerfulness persisted. Pollock and Mr. Carpenter, against the dazzling sunshine, watched it, each in his own way.

'The Harrow match at Lords was not to be despised,' said Pollock, 'but this is better, a lot better. It gains in lightness what it loses in social glamour.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mr. Carpenter, who shaded his eyes and strained them this way and that like a man trying to see what has become of his wife.

But Pollock never moved his eyes at all. The general effect was enough for him.

'Which contributes most, the weather, or the women's colours, or the idea of the races, or the fact that everyone is showing off somebody he's proud of? What does the trick, Mr. Carpenter?'

'Oh, don't ask me riddles like that,' Mr. Carpenter laughed.

'There's Curly Edwards' young brother,' said Pollock, pointing to the raft in front of the barge. 'I expect he's pretty well intoxicated with Curly to-day.'

'And Philip Hamilton with him,' cried Mr. Carpenter. 'One of my boys! The young rascal, how did he get leave to come away from school?'

Pollock might have suggested the means, but already Mr. Carpenter was far on his way to the raft.

Idly he followed, and from his mood of dreamy appre-

ciation, easily and happily, he passed into the throng itself. He went inside the barge.

'Mr. Pollock! How-do-you-do; we have been hoping we should see you.'

This was Mrs. Tremayne, at whose house he had stayed last summer.

'Now tell us,' said she, 'Ethel and I have been wondering; who is that very odd clergyman wearing a pink flannel cap?'

Pollock laughed, actually laughed, so light was the atmosphere that day. 'It's the chaplain of the college,' he said, 'the famous Porker Colquhoun.'

They listened. The chaplain's deep voice resounded as he explained to somebody's mother that rowing was good training not only physically but morally.

'Strange,' said Mrs. Tremayne, and once more Pollock had the heart to laugh.

'Where is George? I hope he has got you some tea or something?'

'George has given us tea,' she said, 'but he has gone off and neglected everything that matters. For instance, he hasn't shown us Mr. Edwards. I shan't be able to appreciate the race unless I've seen Mr. Edwards first. I *must* see him.'

Stout, happy, harmonious, thought Pollock as he stood over the mother of Tremayne. He liked her. She was doing exactly what was right and fitting. She touched lightly on the ever neglectful George, whose desertion really hurt her; but she was deeply serious about Curly, for whom she did not care two straws. That was paying homage to the genius of the time. It was harmonious. Pollock looked up and down the crowded interior of the barge.

'I don't see him. But that exceedingly straight old lady with white hair is his aunt. That's the nearest I can take you. If you watch her carefully you'll see that everything she says and does is meant to show how utterly indifferent she is to Curly's greatness. As a matter of fact she's fit to turn inside out with pride.' Curly's aunt was another thing that Pollock found harmonious.

Slowly through the crush of people, through flanneled undergraduates and genial dons, through hot parents and creamy cool daughters, he made his way to the table where the wrecks of tea were still worth picking at. In an idle, unanxious way he looked for Keddy. All he found was Robinson's mother sitting down to a large bun. But here again the insignificant blot was lost in the general serenity. Pollock was not annoyed even by Robinson's mother. Through the window of the barge, ringing out from across the raft, came the explanatory tones of Colquhoun.

'Yes, the first division rows at six—six sharp. And if our chaps don't pull it off to-day they'll deserve to be tarred and feathered. If only they'd put some beef into it! God bless my soul! I've coached the eight for the last nine years, and I never knew such a sickly set of rotters. Curly is the only one in the whole show who has a notion what work means. Hullo, Carpenter, you here? Yes, if we don't do it to-day, I'll eat my boots. Hi there! come here; this is our cox. Now, young man, if you don't want to have your neck wrung, you just listen to me.'

But Pollock looked at Curly's aunt, and her stiff-backed restraint became one with Colquhoun's exuberance, making a whole that was still delightful, typical, harmonious.

He walked down the room, which was a little stuffy, and out on to the raft. To his right the barges in a streak of colour stretched up the river bank with flags and awnings and bright dresses. To his left the water glistened down to Iffley. In front the punt-loads glided up and down. And in the midst of all that soothed and flattered his senses he saw the face of Keddy screwed up in the sunshine as he stood on the raft with Tremayne—Keddy in dark flannel, Keddy wriggling with amusement, Keddy being ragged by Tremayne. Then Pollock knew that two of his ideas were proved true: that this day was the feast of anti-Delvillism, and that Keddy, more than Curly or Colquhoun or any muslined maid or swarthy eightsmen, was the genius of the hour. For Keddy was

an incandescent mass of unlaboured enjoyment. The eights themselves were but a means to this end.

'Here, Arthur, come and help me,' said Tremayne; 'Keddy's getting completely out of hand. He's behaving as if we were at supper at the Continental. It's disgraceful.'

'My dear Keddy!'

'If only he'd restrain himself in public, if only he'd wait, if only he'd choose more suitable objects for his outbursts——'

Keddy continued grinning.

'I saw him with his arms round Curly's aunt's head.'

'Keddy! And Carpenter here in purpose to keep you safe!'

'Her parasol got caught in her veil,' said Keddy, quite sorry that the silence of Tremayne obliged him to explain.

'Really, it will be impossible for Curly to bring his maiden aunts on to the barge!'

'And my arms weren't really round her head at all.'

But Mrs. and Miss Robinson were embarking in a punt at the side of the raft, and Keddy's crime was forgotten as they watched the achievement. There was no grinning then.

'There's a kind of completeness about the Robinson family,' said Pollock very gravely. 'It's the kind of thing Solomon would have shown the Queen of Sheba. "My suburbs!"'

'And there was no more spirit left in her,' said Tremayne.

That was all that needed saying about the Robinson family. But beyond them the river stretched upwards, the colour moved, the shimmer of life continued, and the westering sun beat down on dazzled faces watching silently.

'It's ripping,' said Keddy; and to Pollock even this observation seemed valuable.

There was a noise behind, too familiar to make them turn. 'Put your back into it, man—put your back into it!'

'Don't you think, if Porker is very, very good,' said

Keddy, 'he'll go to a heaven where it's eights week through all eternity, with little boatfuls of cherubs racing up and down——'

But Tremayne's sister had joined them, and Keddy found himself introduced before he could turn round.

'Here, Ethel, this is Keddy ; he doesn't know the difference between heaven and Henley. It's too absurd.'

What Pollock enjoyed was the fact that neither Keddy nor Miss Tremayne found this introduction insufficient.

'I do really know the difference,' Keddy pleaded.

In another moment there would have come the epigram to which the conversation was tending, and on a day so easy and lazy as this it would probably have been a poor one. But Robinson, in midstream, had lost the pole that propelled his punt. Elusiveness, of course, is one of the beauties of a punt-pole, and the group on the raft were moved to appreciation. The end of the incident found Keddy and Pollock alone.

'Shall we run with the crowd ?' Pollock suggested.

'What, run all the way with the eights ?'

'Yes ; are you shocked ?'

'Well, it's so unlike you. Should I enjoy it ?'

'Of course you would. We'll go in and find some clothes to wear.'

They went into the barge, where now only a few of the more weary persons lingered, through into the changing-room to capture the first and most fitting garments that came to hand. Then, in sweaters, shorts, and stockings, they were put across the river in the boatman's punt to join the long stream of men who were going down to the starting-place of the race.

'This makes me laugh,' Keddy observed. 'It makes me laugh at you because it's so strenuous, and at me because it's so ripping the way I always do everything that ought to be bad for my heart.'

Far on ahead of them the towpath was dotted with the energetic persons whose patriotism was to take the form of running and shouting with the eights. White was the colour here. The varied hues of dress and parasol were gathered on the roofs of the barges behind, and lining the



stream again with orderly borders of gaiety. In front of Keddy and Pollock it was life in another aspect, life male and strenuous, and verging on muscularity. This, perhaps, gave Pollock pause. Perhaps he regretted the point to which his appreciation of the scene had drawn him. At the Long Bridges he stopped. He told Keddy it was far enough. Here they would wait for the race, and run with it from here.

So they leant against the railings of the bridge, and the energetic stream went past them. There was plenty of stuff for comment, and Keddy, at least, was in an acutely observant mood. There was the fellow from New College who had come to the Clavering last week. He ran like an animal trying to get along on its hind legs. There was a man in a funny cap, with great lappets tied together on the top ; Keddy had thought this headgear was only used by burglars. Here, to his delight, came someone he had met at St. Saviour's house, the hero of a famous remark, who had said that he not infrequently went out at night with neither his cap nor his gown. And that person in brown was the man who ran his bicycle into Keddy's horse, and said, 'Oh, will he mind?' There was pleasure in it all, fuel for Keddy's babble, even in the incongruity of a nurse and perambulator passing down the tow-path—the pram, by the way, containing a baby whose face was just like Buddha. But Pollock spotted none of these wayside humours for himself. His view was general ; his eyes turned back to the colour and the crowd and the flags that floated from the barges in the breeze.

'Keddy, how jolly it all looks ! What is it like ? Give me one of your special Keddyesque comparisons.'

Keddy was grave, and looked.

'It's like a dog's coat when it's well brushed,' he said : 'smooth and glossy and comfortable when you touch it.'

'With no mangy patches.'

'Of course not,' said Keddy.

'Better than climbing out to Angel Square ? Now, it's really better, isn't it, honestly ?'

Keddy was far from denying it. Pollock's view of

eights week rather pleased him. It was true enough that the bitter, contentious side of life was far away from this, and the mangy patches also. But it was laying it on a bit thick to suggest that eights week was got up simply to make a few social outcasts feel foolish.

'Look, here comes our boat. Curly really does look ripping.'

He did. 'The antithesis of Delvillism,' said Pollock.

'Oh, let's forget Delville.'

The boat, going down to the starting-place, monopolized attention. And Colquhoun went past them on the path, breathing fire, while Keddy's eyes sought Pollock's for sympathy in a joke too obvious for words.

The air began to stir with that enjoyable fussiness that precedes a race. They could feel it where they were; they could intercept the current that went between the white crowd waiting for the start, and the coloured lines of excitement watching from the barges for the passing and the finish. Yet Keddy did not quite forget what he said should be forgotten. He deplored the ill-luck that had prevented his people coming to Oxford that day. There was somebody's family in a punt on the opposite bank, all tuned up for the race, attention and good-humour and high spirits. It showed Keddy what might have been.

'Because I'd have made' Bobby come and help me to punt them about. It's just what he wants.'

'There's no place for Bobby here,' said Pollock.

'It's just what he wants,' said Keddy.

Pollock was perched on the rail of the bridge, watching for the start. 'Let's forget Bobby as well as Delville,' he said. 'They spoil it all. They're too far gone. They'd only pull it out of tune. Hullo, there's the gun. One minute more. Wake up, Keddy, and be interested.'

Keddy did both. And the one minute passed, and the race began. And into this story the race must come through Pollock's eyes, and lit with his philosophy. Did it matter? Was it of consequence that their boat made no bump? That it came so tremulously near one? That on Monday it would surely be achieved? This did

not trouble Pollock. With the rest he ran, he even shouted, and deplored the unsatisfying outcome. But it was a mockery. Though men had torn their heartstrings in it, it was a mockery, the lightest and dearest mockery. Only by those who knew the value of mockery could such a scene be understood. For the pest of society is the specialist, whether his line be vice or virtue or jocular anecdotes. And here the very breath they breathed was anti-specialist. In a minute the men who would have died for victory would be ready to die for the right answer to the laughing observation of a girl. Fathers would presently be back in sombre offices, sisters away in London finishing the season. They would forget the throb of excitement. Mr. Carpenter would be writing little cards of invitation at St. Saviour's House ; Curly's aunt would hold a rod of iron over her brother's home, and they would forget if their boat were near to bumping or to being bumped. But they would not forget that the sun had shone, and the flags had waved, and the faces of mankind had smiled.

Such was the race to Pollock, while the mangy patches on the social coat were out of sight and mind. He stood with Keddý where they had stopped running, where delight and disappointment bubbled up and down the tow-path, loud cheering and light cursing ; while on the barges opposite the strain relaxed, the colour moved, and the hum of talk began.

'Let's get across,' said Keddý.

Through the stream of panting men, through the crowd that had run with the race, through noise and varied comments they made their way down to the place which was opposite their own barge. Pollock, too, was keen to get across. He wanted the barge, the people, the return of the boat. He wanted to condole with Curly, to hear Tremayne's mother saying what a pity it was, even to hear Colquhoun hurling imprecations to the skies. He wanted the fuss, the press, the eager pretence of interest.

'Oh, quick, come on, the punt's just going across !'

Keddý sprinted forward, dodging in and out of the

men in his way. In the punt was Colquhoun, as black as thunder, and as loud. Men were crowding in.

But they were too late, or the punt was too full. The boatman pushed off, and Keddy said 'Damn,' and laughed. Pollock was really disappointed. The sight of the barge acted on him magnetically.

Then Keddy pinched his arm and pointed.

'Here we are ; this'll do us.' He called to a punt a little way up from where they stood.

'Bobby!' He ran along the towpath, took up a pebble and threw it. The pebble hit between the shoulders, and Wilton, standing alone in the punt, turned round.

'Bobby, come and put us across.'

Immediately the punt was gliding to the nearest steps. Keddy jumped in, and Pollock, when it could be done more decorously, followed. They lay on the cushions at the end, and Wilton, saying nothing, pushed off.

There was just enough of devilry in Keddy to have made him plan, of malice aforethought, the situation he had brought about thus carelessly. And the first thing he did after making himself comfortable for their short journey, was to start giggling.

'It's only because of your going across in Bobby's punt,' he explained, 'with all the college on the raft to watch.'

Pollock laughed shortly. As a matter of fact he was much too dreamily contented to care a jot whether he was being punted across by man or fiend. Even an outcast's punt goes softly on the water ; the sunbeams caress the ripples of its course ; the bosom of the water will uphold it ; gently again and again it moves with smooth regularity. Pollock turned his head, and the raft was in his view, where everyone was crowding for the boat's return, and the sound of their voices was clearer, louder, happier. Wilton did not trouble him, for Wilton simply was not there.

But Keddy did not turn towards the barge. He lay as he was, and his eyes were on the stern of the punt whence came the lazy smooth drives of human force

that lulled his senses as they moved along. He was as happy as Pollock, and as serene. And he had the private joy of seeing that Pollock had been wrong in an important matter. He saw there was a place for Wilton in this scene. The river was crowded ; to cut across the stream would have been impossible in such a crush. But they had started a little up-stream from their barge, and now, with slow progress, with deft steering, in and out of countless passing craft, crookedly and cautiously they floated down and worked across. The sun beat down on colour and activity, the cheerful sounds grew nearer with the other bank, and the eights came slowly down the stream. And Wilton was obviously a part of this. Indeed, he was not gay or loud. He did not gaze like Pollock with wide-seeing eyes. But his punt went skilfully. He steered his way with easy adroitness, and with pleasure. His body kept time with the soothing motion of the punt, and his eyes, from their work of watching, found time to enjoy each plunge and lift of the pole. The water splashed from it, trickled down his bare arm, and the outcast, though silent, was happy.

Keddy nudged Pollock to bring him back from dream-land.

‘Here we are ; we’re in time. Here’s our boat just coming.’

‘Oh, my word, yes !’ And Keddy enjoyed the easy, friendly way in which Pollock called out to Bobby to keep down towards the lower end of the raft. He was pleased with himself for having brought Bobby on the scene, and in any case this was a more comfortable crossing than in the boatman’s old punt with all that crowd. The crowd had landed now, Colquhoun and the others. They were standing on the raft. Carpenter was there too, standing with Curly’s brother. And Tremayne and his sister, and Curly’s aunt with Curly’s father, and others, on the raft and lining the roof of the barge, in the colours of youth and middle age. There was Oxford and London, all wreathed in smiles and graciousness for the returning heroes, who at least had done their best and brought glory so near. No one but Colquhoun was dissatisfied,

Keddy turned round with a vengeance then. The barge was worth watching. And the boat, as it came, was worth watching still more. It came very slowly through the crowded thoroughfare of the river. The men in the bows kept turning round and calling to the smaller craft to clear the way. It was all worth watching.

It was just at the moment—for these things get fixed in one's memory—when Keddy saw Mrs. Robinson pointing with her umbrella at Wilton that he felt Pollock jerk himself up beside him.

'Bobby! Do look out where you're going!' Pollock cried nervously.

Keddy looked everywhere at once. The men in the bows of the eight were calling out to Wilton. From the raft came Colquhoun's voice—'Hi, there, you Johnny-head-in-air! Look out!'

And then it happened. It was the sparkling water running down the pole, thought Keddy. For an instant Wilton had let his attention wander. And now, with the violence of sudden alarm, he pulled the punt round to drive it out away from the eight. He pulled too vigorously. The stern of the punt swung smartly round into the bows of the eight. There was a noise of broken woodwork. 'Lord!' said Keddy, and Pollock sprang up to his feet.

Measured by inches, measured by cash, measured by material damage, the calamity was as small as anyone could hope. But they say, when a train dashes into the buffers, there is more damage done by the rebound than by the collision. There was the space of an instant, and in it Mrs. Robinson was reported to have said 'Alas!' And Keddy, in panic, once bitten and twice afraid, was looking at nothing but Wilton's face, where instinct, as he saw, as he saw with a throb of hope, was framing a distressed apology. Then was the rebound.

'Lord, he's smashed the boat,' said the man in the bows. And somebody, it was not clear who, but somebody from the eight, added the lamentable reproach: 'Oh, it's Wilton! It's Wilton, of course!'

Keddy's glance flashed back to Wilton, and his heart

gave the most horrid jumps. He was in time to see a picture which, artistically, had never been surpassed.

The dark flush, the blazing eyes, the anger flashing like steel, Keddy knew it all.

'Smashed the boat, have I? I'm very glad I have. Why the hell don't you look out for your blasted boat yourselves, you stinking bargees? Why don't you make your bloody cox keep straight?'

This and more he shouted at them, amid silence, and his victory was unquestioned. With the weapon he chose they could not equal him, his ground of battle was his own, and the vehemence of his rush had paralyzed. He stood there glaring, his pole in his hands, and it was as if a passing star had gone over the scene, leaving beauty scorched and blackened ashes where it went. Only Colquhoun was equal to it, standing where he did on the raft with the women and the men who had ceased to breathe. He said something, Keddy could not remember what, but something with 'college' in it, and on him Wilton rounded like a fireman's hose—'God damn your college.' No one reported what Mrs. Robinson had said then.

'Oh, for God's sake, let's get out of this,' said Pollock, who, like the rest, had been stricken rigid. Now he ran down the punt, to Wilton's end, which had drifted near the raft. He jumped a yard of water and landed safe. People were moving away. Some made futile pretence of not having noticed anything; more valiant persons hoped the damage was not serious. And Pollock hurried muttering and shivering into the barge like someone just rescued from freezing water.

'Now, isn't this a pity!'

Keddy, as he left the punt, heard Mrs. Tremayne's comfortable voice making that very sensible observation. But he was cross with all the world, too cross to forgive anybody for saying or doing anything. It all seemed to point the incident. He stood there among them, the Tremaynes, Curly's aunt, and others like them, and every second seemed to make it clearer that the lightest, happiest scene that Oxford had shown him had changed to strain and discomfort. He did not follow Pollock into

the barge. He stood on the raft biting his nails. He looked dully at Colquhoun dancing round among the people, declaiming what angered Keddy for its very naturalness—apologies, loud apologies. He felt Mr. Carpenter take his elbow with ‘Malcolm dear, you mustn’t mind. I’m so sorry for you. But everyone understands.’

Keddy, being cross, was not very cordial with Mr. Carpenter. As a matter of fact, it was Colquhoun who was mainly responsible for the worst features of the situation at that moment. His trumpeting about scandals and disgraces and cads and never forgiving himself were the last things wanted. Keddy went off quickly towards the barge, to escape. He found himself walking past Tremayne and his sister going the same way. On the gunwale of the barge, lest he had been rude to them, he stopped and stood waiting with his hands in his pockets. The Tremaynes were coming slowly towards him. But before them, perhaps accounting for their crawling pace, marching across the raft, pulling on his coat, his eyes striking out to right and left, came the maker of pictures. The thumping and banging of Keddy’s heart began again. He bit his nails, and looked at Wilton, and Wilton looked at him. Before Wilton reached him, before he had decided what to do, he jumped down from the gunwale and went inside the barge. He did not see what Wilton looked like as he walked down the plank to the land, and it was not till he reached the door of the changing room that it struck him with an odd pang that the coat which Wilton was pulling on his back was an old flannel coat of his own. Such things have a nasty meaning at times.

In the changing-room the scene might have amused Keddy at any other time. It suggested cook in hysterics on the kitchen table. It was Pollock shaking his ruffled plumage about the room. ‘If ever I’m so imprudent again! If ever I let myself come within half a mile of him! Great Scott! we might have known it! What did I tell you? Why didn’t I let my instinct warn me? I knew it. Oh Lord!’



He jerked about the room, appealing to the universe at large, panting, shuddering. What a headache he would have that night! 'And Porker, oh Lord, I heard him through the window!' Keddy leant against the row of lockers and watched this fellow creature in pain, and said nothing.

Then came the rowing men and others with them. Of necessity they made their comments on events, and Keddy had to listen. When you have fifteen people in a room in a state of almost superhuman unanimity it is quite absurd to blame them for trying to express the prevalent idea. Anyone making attempts at extenuation would have brought not peace but a sword. The changing-room became no place for Quakers, but men went out of it more genial than they came in. Curly Edwards, also, did a thing worth recording. He came in and saw Keddy standing silent in dull wretchedness. He went straight up to him and burst out laughing in his face. And this, because it had been done so many times before, when things were smooth and normal, was the spell that could best avail to ease the situation. The connection of Keddy with Bobby Wilton's enormities, to Mr. Carpenter a peril, to Pollock an offence, was to Curly a joke.

Whatever Keddy thought and cared about perils and offences he cared a good deal about his own immediate sensations, and to Curly, who gave him the first pull back to happiness, he was duly grateful. Before he left the changing-room he had cause for gratitude to Pollock too, an unenthusiastic solid gratitude. For public feeling began to take a horrid turn. It pointed down a path simply strewn with what Keddy hated. It ceased to curse the satanic Wilton. It drew breath. A not unpleasant memory crept over it, and it began to consider the types and modes of vengeance. Not to-night, perhaps, would the rite be celebrated. But on Wednesday next would be the last night of eights, training over, and a frame of mind towards midnight which would perceive the dictates of justice as clearly as now. The soothsayers might tell Wilton to beware of Wednesday night.

And then—‘God forbid that we should touch him,’ said Pollock.

Such an agony of nervous horror bristled in the words that everyone turned to look. Pollock continued pulling on his trousers with irritated jerks.

What did he mean ?

‘Gracious heavens, haven’t we had enough of him ? For God’s sake let’s try and forget him. We’ve cut him off as well as we can. It’d be sheer madness to go and turn him into a public character, more than he is already. It’s just what he’d like, curse him. We’ve got him here, for our sins ; for mercy’s sake don’t go and stick him on a bigger dungheap than he’s on already.’

Pollock argued not exactly with honey in his mouth, but he was effective. He made an important convert in Curly.

‘I suppose we’d better leave the skunk alone,’ said Curly. Like many men of his type he was rather afraid of nerves such as Pollock’s.

So they were to leave the skunk alone. That was the official policy. Keddy left the barge ; the others had not finished changing, but it was better to walk up alone. He had to digest events. He had to think about leaving the skunk alone, and to get what comfort he could from the knowledge that the horrors of a row had been avoided. It was unbearable, impossible, to think what he would have done had they taken the plan of vengeance. Alliance, opposition, flight were equally unthinkable. But it was not to be. They were to leave the skunk alone, as Curly said. Or there was Arthur’s maturer saner criticism. ‘If you drive a man into exile,’ he had said, ‘you’ve no more right to wreck his room than to eat his food. You’ve got to leave him alone.’ So Keddy went on with his eyes on the ground, while all around him the people, mellow with contentment, walked up from the barges, with the crunching of gravel and the hum of good humour under a sky of pleasure that had clouded in no place but one. How many of all these would not have agreed to leave the skunk alone ? It came into Keddy’s mind to trace a connection, whether of ideas or

of mere words, between this leaving alone and the old principle of avoidance. Was it sound? Had the whole world been won to the idea of avoidance? Had they turned their backs on the thing that was evil, and had Keddy actually to be glad? What a topsy-turvy idea! Yet he could have thanked them for leaving the skunk alone. He remembered their threatening words and his alarm. He thought of the fierce face of Bobby as he came up from the raft. Bobby had looked at him. From Bobby he had turned away. And what a thing was this to remember now! He, too, had left the skunk alone.

So he strode along more sulkily, and the gaiety around oppressed him. He was glad that it grew thinner when the streets were reached. His pace quickened, and new unhappiness, new fear, took the place of the old. There was something to make him hurry, there was anxiety. He hurried to undo a thing that he had done, and with his quickening footsteps went his fears. He had eaten a herb in the forest, strange to him, and the thought of poison followed. There was little practical comfort in remembering that the herb was a common food of men, that all he had done was to leave the skunk alone.

Hot and anxious he arrived in Wilton's room. Wilton sat writing a letter.

'Hullo,' said Keddy. Between the two of them the marks of guilt were all on him.

'Oh, hullo, is that you?' Wilton answered. But his letter was too engrossing to permit him to turn round. He went on writing, and spoke, in a moment, in that terrible voice of cheerful indifference.

'I thought we'd said good-bye for ever.'

'Oh, damn!' said Keddy, just as if a column of accounts had added up wrong.

'Or perhaps you're the advance guard of the party coming to stash my room.'

Keddy stood on the hearthrug, shifting from leg to leg, wincing under punishment.

'You'd better wait for the others before you begin. Oh, damn this railway guide, it's last month's. Never mind, the Oxford trains don't change.'

It was exactly this cruel hardness that Keddy had been fearing as he came along. And even now, in the worst of it, the larger, vaguer part of his fears was not fulfilled or eased.

'I suppose you're sick with me for going into the barge when you went past,' he said.

The words were a characteristic use of the Keddy frontal method, spoken sulkily.

'My dear Keddy, you were absolutely right. Arthur would have been quite vexed if you hadn't.'

'Well—I couldn't help it,' Keddy answered. 'I just did it. I wish I hadn't now.'

Whereat Wilton said nothing, but shut the railway guide and went on writing. And Keddy began to think of the letter. For the simple reason that the letter was the first thing Wilton did after the row; it was the letter that Keddy feared. He feared the consequences of the row, and, however absurdly, he felt a responsibility.

'What's that letter you're writing?' he asked.

'Oh, come and look,' said Wilton.

Keddy leant his hands on the desk and read. From the top of the second page he read, the first page lying over. 'The train arrives about eleven. I will meet you, and we will have luncheon on the river, and watch the races from the college barge. Mind you come.'

The writing stopped. 'Who is it?' said Keddy.

Wilton shrugged his shoulders, turned over the page, and Keddy read, 'My dear Gertrude.'

So he sat down on the desk, and put his foot on Wilton's chair, and looked at him with solemn eyes in the way that people laughed at.

'Bobby, may I tear this up—now?'

'Oh, is it badly written?' said Wilton, and he examined it carefully.

'May I tear it up?'

'No, Keddy, you're all wrong. It's no good. You see, I'm fighting a little duel of my own, and one stroke is to bring Gertrude Oakes down here and trot her about on the barge with everyone's sisters and cousins and aunts. It appeals to me. I like the idea.'

Keddy thought for a moment.

'Well, you told me she looks exactly like anyone else, so that won't matter much.'

'Yes, it will,' said Wilton. 'You can trust Delville and me to pull it off.'

So Keddy looked his full, and crossed his arms, and felt creation swimming underneath him.

But many words were saved, for he knew the limits of the possible. He knew that Wilton was not to be moved. He sat still in the place where he had come by ignoring Mr. Carpenter's advice. He thought of Angel Square, and Curly's laugh, and many things on this side of the fence and on that. But the product of his thought was nothing but blind sensations, and the throb of his sensations was all pain.

The more formidable moral problems present no splendid choice of right and wrong. The choice is between two courses, both wrong, both ugly, both unpleasant. It was a choice between sticking to a callous blackguard and leaving a drowning friend.

Wilton finished, and addressed the letter.

'If you take my advice,' he said, 'you'll clear off as you did just now when you went inside the barge.'

He closed the envelope with careful attention.

But he did not know, while Keddy sat silent, how strong was the instinct to do as his words suggested. To clear off, turn away, and leave the skunk alone! So strong was the instinct that it seemed to Keddy almost that he had done it. Just for an instant it seemed that indeed he had shut the door on Wilton, and was out in the fresh clean air, with the knowledge of freedom and the remorse. Why was it that the thought came up so vividly? It was because this very afternoon he had done in little what he might now do at large. He had turned away, and cursed his soul that he had done so. And thus from the facility of the thought he found the impossibility of the fact; his feelings, like the water by the sea, shrinking and withdrawing, met the volume of a stronger force, re-gathered, and came hurtling back to shore in one new wave together. And upon this he acted.

He took out his watch.

'Bobby, it's nearly seven.'

He nudged him with his foot on the chair to gain attention.

'I don't want to go into hall. Let's go out and dine somewhere. We'll split a bottle of fiz.'

Wilton looked up quickly with eyes of curious interest.

'Yes,' he said, 'that's rather an idea. What a funny fellow you are!'

## CHAPTER IX

### CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR

WE have all heard in our time that moral obliquities bring physical evils in their train. But the law is not understood to apply vicariously, and it was really distressing for anyone to see the way in which every step in Keddy's downward path was followed by a catastrophe, not in his, but in Pollock's nervous system. Its traces were obvious even after a night's rest. It was told, by way of Tremayne, that somebody's father had passed poor Pollock in the quad that Sunday morning with the comment, 'That young fellow looks a sad rake.' Now there are other people who take life seriously, Mr. Carpenter, for instance, but no one would have made such a remark about him.

The truth was that Pollock had just heard of the appalling fact that Keddy, little more than an hour after Wilton had stamped himself for an execrable cad before the world, had seen fit to go with him in equal publicity to the Clarendon Hotel, dine with him *tête-à-tête* without a blush, and leave the room with a hand on his shoulder. How he could do it, how, apart from all question of prudence, he could have brought himself to associate with, to finger and caress, that mass of pollution reeking with offence, this was what Pollock could not even consider without risk of mental derangement. How he could do it! Even the unimaginative Curly stretched out his long legs and wondered. George Tremayne was near to revising his views of Keddy. With his scar above his eye, he looked, as he was, the organ of his party's

pugnacity, and he was by no means accepting as final the resolve to leave the skunk alone. A day would come. And Tremayne had no place for one who dwelt in both camps, as Keddy did. Curly, for his part, saw no reason why Keddy should not dine where he pleased, though heaven knew his taste was surprising. But it was not till Tremayne had left the room that Curly gave Pollock his deeper reflection. 'Damn it, though, if I thought Keddy felt for me what he must feel for Bobby, I'd—well I'd like it.'

'But he does,' said Pollock crossly, 'and for me and for everything else that walks on two legs. Don't you go away with the idea that it's a case of romantic friendship and all that. It's simply indiscriminate bad taste raised into a principle. If you were to go and break Bobby's jaw now Keddy would just take your arm, and say, "You're very stupid, Curly." It's simply callousness.'

Thus Pollock argued, well knowing that the time had come when Curly was nearer the truth than he. And so the little mice squeaked day by day in wonder or annoyance. Keddy's own private squeak was all on a pitch of satisfaction. He had, on the Saturday night after dinner, made Wilton promise not to take Miss Oakes on the barge. That part of the programme was abandoned, and Keddy was absurdly pleased. It was not, however, on any sound principles that the concession was won. It was not as if he had appealed successfully to Wilton's higher feelings. He had merely explained that another barge row would be inconvenient to him personally, and therefore, please, would Bobby not do it. Bobby promised and Keddy was extravagantly delighted.

Colquhoun, very naturally, had a great deal to say after the catastrophe of Saturday. He told it in Gath, and he published it in Askelon, and he left no one in any sort of doubt as to the fact of his disapproval. He assumed, in a manner, the full responsibility for the outrage, and apologized to the world at large with a reverberant humility relieved only by dark hints of vengeance. But Pollock was the only sufferer therefrom. Pollock's agree-



ment with the general sentiment could not reconcile him to the method of expression.

So the hubbub continued—anger, scorn, surprise, recrimination. The ears grow dull with it, the nerves begin to twitch. It is better to be out of it. It is better to be where one man sees the right course and pursues it. That man was Tatham, and the idyll of Tatham is as follows.

Herbert John Tatham was the son of a London solicitor and a clergyman's younger daughter joined in lawful wedlock at a ritualist place of worship. In a cold methodical way he was the bright boy of his family from the first. He asked no smart questions, supplied his fond parents with hardly an average number of the precious little stories of childhood, and was neither very good nor very naughty. But his lessons were always learnt well. His parents sent him to an admirable school, from which he obtained an exhibition at the Oxford college where Wilton was just then passing the entrance examination. But already his business instincts were awakened. His mother was full of good works, a pillar of her parish. Social teas, meetings, bazaars, district visiting were always with her. And in these it was the habit of the boy to take an interest. 'He will be a clergyman,' cried his happy mother; 'he is greedy of good works.' 'He will make a fortune,' said his father on the same score. 'His industry and common-sense are beyond praise.' Which parent prophesied aright was a matter of sore doubt to Mr. Carpenter.

It will be remembered that Tatham's taste for organized good works was productive at Oxford of the phenomena called Tathamites. There was no Tathamite so presentable as Tatham. For he, in his private capacity, had friends of some standing, athletes and men of letters. But his Tathamites were not so lucky. They were a miscellaneous collection of social obscurities, creeping out like strange creatures from the hidden places of the earth, and united in the single fact that one and all fulfilled themselves in Tatham. They formed no sort of society. They came from more colleges than one. Each, for some

reason, was a solitary soul, like the caterpillars one has sometimes met in the streets of London. If you went out, for instance, for a ride with Bobby, you might meet one walking in a lonely road four miles away. And then, if you were Keddy, for some unaccountable reason you would feel a brute.

But Tatham never felt a brute. Why should he? It was he who took the Tathamites in hand, improved their minds and manners, linked suitable pairs in friendship, and carried off an odd one now and then to lay on the doorstep of St. Saviour's House. He was perfectly aware that his *protégés* were for the most part beneath contempt, but what difference did that make? A case was a case to Tatham, and the idea of missing or bungling the chance of a sound achievement would have disgusted him utterly. So the roll of his good works grew long, and his confidence was great. He was sight to the blind and strength to the halt, and strange it would have been indeed had he found the glaring case of Wilton and passed by on the other side.

It was the Sunday after the scene on the river, and Keddy met Tatham coming out of St. Saviour's House.

'Oh, Forth,' said Tatham, stopping him, 'I've just been talking to Carpenter.'

Tatham, who was rather squat and of a very robust appearance, spoke always with the assured deliberation that comes of long success. One felt oneself becoming a Tathamite even as his measured words came out. He was, in fact, patronizing, and it made not the slightest difference that the object of his patronage was a friend of Edwards, Pollock, and Tremayne.

'I've been telling Carpenter,' he continued, 'that I think it is quite time something was done for Wilton.'

'I see,' said Keddy in some surprise. 'And what did Carpenter say?'

'Carpenter is not always right,' said Tatham. 'He always sees so many difficulties. Of course the thing is difficult, as Wilton was once such a blood. But the fact remains that he hasn't a friend in the world, and something ought to be done for him.'

Keddy was respectful, attentive, but he made no contribution to the subject.

‘I am absolutely convinced, Forth, that people are making a great mistake about Wilton. What the man wants now is kindness. He wants gentle treatment. Now Carpenter has promised to ask him to tea, but we must do more than that.’

The use of the word ‘we’ caused Keddy to raise his eyebrows slightly.

‘Now yesterday on the barge,’ said Tatham, ‘I saw you refuse to speak to him. I’m sure anyone in your place would have done the same just then. But still it’s not the right method. If you want good results from Wilton I’m absolutely convinced you must use the greatest kindness. And Carpenter agrees with me in that at least.’

‘Oh, I expect he would,’ said Keddy, with very little enthusiasm.

‘What Wilton needs,’ Tatham repeated, ‘is kindness and attention. He wants bringing out, not driving into exile.’

Keddy leant upon his stick, and preserved an attentive silence smooth with politeness.

‘I thought I’d tell you,’ Tatham continued. ‘Because, when I put the thing in hand, you might—er—be willing to help me. It’s not a very easy job.’

This suggestion rather took Keddy’s breath away.

‘I see,’ he said, and further reflection only enabled him to add, ‘I see.’

Tatham paused, and looked vaguely down the street. Then he said good-bye, and turned up to North Oxford. He did not carry away a very high opinion of Keddy.

Keddy, as a matter of fact, was rather cross. When you have long been labouring out a theory in connection with a very difficult situation it is not flattering to hear another man trot out your mature opinion as though it were the most obvious thing in the world. So Tatham thought kindness was the thing for Bobby. It was precisely that view which Keddy had reached so painfully. Yet he was annoyed that an outside observer like Tatham should coolly hit upon the truth.

He did not speak of it to Wilton. Indeed, the matter passed from his mind for several days. Towards the end of that week he was sitting late in Wilton's room when something was said to recall it.

'I can't think what's the matter with Tatham,' Wilton remarked. 'I've scarcely ever spoken to the fellow before, but this week I must have met him half a dozen times in the quad, and I'll be shot if he hasn't come up and talked to me every time.'

Keddy looked at Wilton's face, which was honestly puzzled, and what had formerly annoyed him became all at once a source of delicious amusement. But Keddy was business-like with things that amused him. He was not going to spoil a good joke by letting the cat out of the bag too soon. He giggled up at the ceiling for some time, and obstinately refused to say why. So Wilton grew cross, and talked about something else. He would have been much more cross, thought Keddy delightedly, had he known that he was to become a Tathamite.

The following Sunday evening Wilton came into Keddy's room at about eleven o'clock.

'I say, this is getting beyond a joke,' he said. 'I've had Tatham in my room for an hour and a half.'

'Oh, poor Bobby! Did he bore you?' Keddy asked.

'I don't know,' said Wilton impatiently. 'He's not exactly a bore. He's not exactly a bounder. He irritates me. What's he up to? Is he trying to run me?'

Thereupon Keddy settled himself comfortably and enjoyed ten charming minutes, while he elaborately told the story of his meeting with Tatham. The result exceeded all his expectations. For the first time in history he saw Wilton thoroughly frightened.

'What the devil does he mean to do to me?' the victim asked.

Keddy answered with deep solemnity. He thought Bobby ought to be very grateful, he said. He would make a whole lot of very nice friends. Besides, Tatham gave very jolly tea-parties, and Bobby would be able to go to them. In very early days Keddy had been to one himself.

But Wilton was not to be comforted.

It may be wondered why his belief in kind treatment did not make Keddy more inclined to assist the enterprise of Tatham than to mock it. When he told Pollock the story, it was just by that embarrassing question that he was met. Keddy laughed, for the idea was too absurd. And the plea of absurdity was all that he could make when Pollock pressed him to explain.

‘When I saw Bobby’s puzzled face as he first told me about it, and when I remembered Tatham’s face while he was telling me what he meant to do, I saw the whole thing was silly.’

Two days later a visit was inflicted on Wilton by a young don from a small college, who had the excuse of having met him somewhere at dinner. He talked a good deal about Tatham, whom he greatly respected. That was on a Thursday, and on the following Saturday Wilton arrived in Keddy’s room at half-past eight in the evening.

‘Here I stay,’ he said, ‘till eleven at the soonest. I can’t help it, Keddy. I won’t stay another night in my own room. Last night—Tatham. The night before—that young cub of a don. Night before that, when I got back, there was a book lying there, with a note from Tatham to say it would interest me after our talk last Sunday. Damn his impudence! He’s driven me out of my own room.’

The poor fellow looked quite worried, and Keddy in his keen delight became characteristically solemn.

‘It’s no good,’ he said. ‘You can make up your mind to it. You’ve got to be a Tathamite. There’s absolutely no escape. In fact, Bobby, if you think of it, you are a Tathamite already.’

But, a day or two after this, his feelings for Tatham were tinged with compassion. He went to his room, and endeavoured to save him from the fate which would surely be his if Wilton were tried too severely.

‘Oh, about Bobby,’ he said. ‘I’m afraid it’s not much good, you know.’

Rather to his surprise, Tatham agreed readily.

‘It’s unfortunate,’ he said, with quiet serenity, ‘but

I'm afraid Wilton has got quite a wrong idea of me. He thinks I want to force him into piety and morality, and of course on those lines I should never have any success with him. He's naturally resentful. What we've got to show him now is that I only want to be his friend. We must make him understand that he may come to my room whenever he likes, and I shall be glad to see him. I would help him in any difficulty. Of course, some men are won by preaching, and some by firmness, but that would be sheer folly with Wilton. Wilton is only to be won by gentleness and friendliness. That's why you've won him, Forth.'

Keddy adopted Tatham's word under protest.

'Oh, I "won" him because we both like riding.'

'Well,' said Tatham, 'the thing to do now is to show him that I don't want to improve his morals, but to be his friend.'

Keddy's diplomacy had broken down; he was rather at a loss. So he set his gaze on Tatham's eyes, and said slowly :

'The fact is—I don't think Bobby likes you.'

He might as well have told a trainer that his colt didn't like being ridden.

'I dare say I've had more experience than you,' Tatham observed, 'and I think you'll see I'm right. Besides, when I've put my hand to the plough, I never look back.'

So Keddy went off discomfited to tell the sad news to Wilton, chuckling quietly as he walked across the quad. He went into Wilton's room—it was in the evening, after hall—and, as on a former very memorable occasion, the sight of Wilton's room gave him a shock. Standing on the hearthrug, his unhappy friend was engaged, under visible self-restraint, in making short answers to the conversation of four most obvious unknown Tathamites who sat about the room in various attitudes of embarrassment. One glance of impotent rage sent Keddy off in glowing enjoyment to a seat in a corner whence he could watch and be silent. Very unkindly he gave Wilton no help at all. He sat shyly in his corner, and remained solemn till the Tathamites went out. Then Wilton turned

on him, and asked him what the devil he meant by it ; and Keddy was solemn no longer.

It appeared that the visitors were four men from a small college, whose fame has never set the Isis on fire, and they had come to ask Wilton to join a botanical society. They had only stayed ten minutes, he admitted, but the thing was not to be borne any longer.

Keddy begged forgiveness for his own shortcomings. Bobby had looked like a lion in a den of Daniels, he said. It had been too good a scene to spoil by interference.

'I'm going to Tatham,' Wilton declared. 'I'm going to stop this bally rot.'

Of course, if he did, he would be sure to find the four botanists again, as Keddy pointed out. So he had to wait, in mingled rage and nervousness, till the danger was presumably past.

Judging his time, he sallied forth, and all the way across the quad Keddy stroked down his ruffled feelings and begged for moderation. But the opening announcement was not so moderate as it might have been.

'Look here, what the devil do you mean by sending your tame curs to my room ?'

Tatham was above all praise. He had not a very merry laugh, but he produced the best one available, and he apologized and laughed again. Without doubt he was innocent of complicity. It was all the mistake of that idiot of a don, who had set the botanists on Wilton. They had just been to tell Tatham about it, and from what he now said it was plain they had received a good wiggling. They would not trouble Wilton again. Wilton, of course, was compelled to accept so frank an apology. And, indeed, so humorous was Tatham about the botanists, so cheerful was his talk, so well did he manage his cigarettes and whisky, that Keddy and Wilton went back to the latter's room in a state of mild repentance.

'But still,' said he, 'the fellow irritates me. I do rather wish we'd had a row.'

Keddy did not like rows, but with the general view he agreed.

'You feel as if you were in a sausage-machine,' he said,

The matter, like most others, cropped up in talk with Mr. Carpenter. The clergymen, though ready enough to discuss Wilton's regeneration in the abstract, though eager to say how much he had liked him when he met him at tea in Keddy's room, was not willing to go deeply into the Tatham side of the question. He maintained a reticence, tinged, Keddy thought, with disapproval. He even went so far as to say that sometimes, perhaps, sometimes, Tatham had not quite the right spirit—not quite.

Naturally it was not explained what the right spirit might be. That would have been unkind to Tatham, and Keddy therefore had to worry it out for himself. It was mysterious. Though not given to all the exercises which St. Saviour's House might tentatively recommend, he was nevertheless a religious boy, and it puzzled him, it puzzled him like the devil, that Tatham with his good intentions was not more attractive. It was funny, to begin with, that the man who acted in such a practical Christian spirit should really be doing far less for Bobby's happiness than Keddy, who in these days went about with him simply and solely because he liked him. But it was much more odd that Tatham's ways should irritate, not only a sensitive man like Bobby, but also Keddy, who himself was not free from the wish to work for Bobby's welfare. It was a problem that he kept to himself, and pondered, sure that the answer would come some day, as answers always did. And he was not disappointed.

It was on the last Saturday of the term. Keddy and Wilton went down the river in a punt to have tea on an island between Iffley and Sandford. The outing had been thought desirable, because of an unfounded suspicion that Tatham's family were coming down to Oxford for the day. Wilton had a panic about invitations to meet them, and, passing Tatham in the quad, he took the offensive, and volunteered the information that he was lunching at Magdalen, and going to have tea at Rose Island with Keddy. To this arrangement Keddy conformed with no more than a proper show of grumbling. But the day was hot, even for June. Very slowly they dawdled down the river, and only when tea and shade were



near did their spirits rise to the right level of contentment. As a rule, the further they were from Oxford, the more enjoyably things went between them. In Keddy's room there might be Pollock strolling in, or Delville into Wilton's, but Rose Island was safe from possibilities like these. So they ordered tea from the inn, and strolled round the island in pleasurable silence in tune with the sweltering slackness of the day. Sometimes they awoke to contented quarrelling, sometimes to comprehensive statements of the fact that they were happy, and the thought of coming disaster never entered their heads.

Just as they were sitting down in the little harbour by the water's edge, where tea and jam and butter and bread were waiting on the white-spread wooden table, Keddy announced in tones of calm despair that he saw Tatham getting out of a canoe at the landing stage. It was all up with them. Wilton jerked round, saw the truth, and swore. Keddy resigned himself to his disappointment, for the tea-party was now spoiled.

The next thing that happened puzzled him extremely. He remembered an incident in his first term when he was with Arthur on the barge, and Curly Edwards coming down from college brought with him a note which had been waiting in the porter's lodge for Keddy. The quality of that good deed, the amount of trouble it cost, were inappreciable. Yet Keddy was more than a little pleased. It was a small piece of quite unnecessary kindness, but it was one of those things that had better have happened than not have happened. Now, Tatham's action was very similar. Yet Keddy and Wilton were annoyed.

He came up and gave Wilton a telegram. He said he had found it in the lodge, and as he wanted exercise he had brought it along to Rose Island in his canoe. He was not going to bore them by staying. He was going on to Sandford.

'Really, Tatham, I'm awfully obliged to you,' Wilton said in an embarrassed way. 'It's most awfully good of you.'

He read the telegram and put it in his pocket.

'Look here, you must stay and have tea here,' he said.

Tatham demurred, but let himself be overborne.

‘Keddy, you lazy hound, go and tell that girl to bring another cup,’ Wilton commanded.

Tatham, however, would go and get the cup himself. They need not drag the poor girl out there, he said.

Remove Tatham, and everything was charming. The sun shone. The creeper on the arbour made delightful shade. The lazy river glided just beyond, with not a boat upon it. The tea looked good upon the table. In the heat of the afternoon the two friends were cool and comfortable. But with them was Tatham, talking efficient small talk, and the blight of him was over all. Two small boys, with a couple of years between their ages, were playing in the rough grass between the arbour and the inn. Wilton suggested making them race for coppers, and Tatham interested himself in the question of what handicap would be fair. Then the bigger boy found a stick, and proceeded to beat the smaller. Splendid, said Wilton. It would be not a race, but a fight. Yes, he saw it in the small boy’s eye already. Tatham thought it looked remarkably like a case of bullying, but Wilton scoffed at such a notion.

Keddy, meanwhile, sat placidly damning the perverseness of things, and wishing that Tatham would direct his benevolence in channels where it might be more appreciated. He wondered what it would be like if Tatham came to nurse you in an illness. You’d certainly recover ; Tatham would insist on that. Tatham would always have the same cheerful smile when he came to the bedside. He’d never forget your medicine. Or would it be better to have Bobby for your nurse ? Bobby had—what was it ?—which Tatham had not. Keddy watched them both, and wondered. It was something hot, with blood in it, which got hold of you in a way that Tatham never would do. You might die under Bobby’s treatment, but you’d have a nicer illness. Then Bobby would be furiously sorry, and swear and storm ; while Tatham, if you died, would say, ‘If it hadn’t been for that boiled chicken we gave him last night—’ and go off to nurse someone else. Keddy felt he was beginning to understand about Tatham.

'Oh,' said Wilton suddenly, with a laugh, 'I've given you my cup, and I've got yours. I'm awfully sorry.'

He had been pouring out third cups of tea, and the announcement of this calamity was made to Tatham.

'Oh, am I the only one who has his own cup?' said Keddy. 'I'm in luck.'

'I hope you don't mind,' Wilton laughed.

'Mind! Oh no.'

In any case, it was beyond remedy. Both cups had already been half emptied.

Wilton drank more, and pointed out with pleasure that the two small boys were quarrelling again. The quarrel amused him. It held his attention. Nothing would have pleased him better than to be arbiter in the fight which might ensue. He regretted that the smaller boy took the blows so tamely. Tatham also, after a minute, gave his attention to the matter.

But Keddy did not. Keddy's back was bent, and his hands lay idle on the table. His eyes, set on Tatham, were dreamy with thought. To his curiously materialistic mind there had come one of those bright flashes of perception which showed him in pictures what others find in studious reflection. He had solved the mystery of Tatham. Tatham would not drink out of Wilton's cup.

He had seen the man's face when Wilton told him of the mistake. He had seen him look farewell to the pleasures of that cup of tea. It was all so quick and slight, but Keddy knew that if the cup went up to his lips again, it would be at an odd angle. Pollock should hear of that. And it would be a proverb that though you turn out kindness and good works with furnace ablaze and chimneys smoking night and day, you will not ever touch a man's heart unless you can drink out of his tea-cup. Keddy was as much excited as an astronomer with a new planet.

'Oh, look at the fool! He's going to interfere!'

Thus Wilton lamented the fact that Tatham could stand the sight of bullying no more. And Keddy's heart was with him. He was tired of good works; they offended and insulted him. Perhaps they would offend the boy?

‘Let’s go,’ he said. ‘We shall have Tatham beside us all the way home. Oh, damn!’

There stood Tatham reproving one and comforting the other, of whom his lips would have touched the cup of neither. Then he followed Wilton and Keddy to the landing stage. Keddy looked back, and saw the boys conspiring amicably, with wide eyes fixed on Tatham. He was pleased. He saw that good intentions were not more effective to win respect from those urchins than from Bobby. And when the boys untied the punt, he gave each of them sixpence with unspoken gratitude.

‘Keddy,’ Wilton whispered, as they stood in the punt, ‘those boys mean mischief.’

They were holding the canoe for Tatham.

‘They do, they do,’ he continued excitedly, when half of Tatham was in the canoe and half of him on land.

And then—‘We are avenged,’ he said. For, by the contrivance of the boys, the frail canoe had rocked and Tatham had vanished in the water.

## CHAPTER X

### A PYRRHIC VICTORY

THERE are men like the famous single-speech Hamilton, the shooting stars of history, who come out of the darkness, blaze for a moment, and return to darkness again. It seemed to Wilton and Keddy in later times that Tatham had been such a man. For three weeks he had filled their lives, and then he sat down in the river Thames, and was seen no more. His body came up, indeed, and Keddy fished it out. And he was alive, indignantly alive. But the glory had departed from him, and only on two famous occasions did he thrust his diminished head into Wilton's life again. Yet they had treated him kindly. Keddy pulled him out of the river, copiously sympathetic, while Wilton knocked the two boys' heads together till vengeance could ask no more. They told him to run home. They put him across to the tow-path, and tied his canoe to their punt. Because his dripping coat was smeared with green slime, Wilton, the more sympathetic by reason of his pleasure in the incident, gave him his own dry coat. This, with grey flannel trousers, which do not look so bad even after a wetting, turned him out a fairly decent figure for those who had not seen him ducked by an urchin of ten years. Ruffled, dripping, inconsolable, shorn of the dignity that kept the bands of Tathamites in check, he trotted up the tow-path, a poor weak human creature like ourselves. They had seen the last of him now, said Wilton, watching him.

Well, at any rate he would not come again to spoil the pleasure of these hours which tea and Nature had con-

spired to make delightful. The sun shone on the lonely river ; the punt moved onwards without haste. Wilton punted ; Keddy lay idle, and away along the tow-path Tatham was a dot as he ran, a few inches of bobbing benevolence whose secret Keddy had found out. Keddy lay on many cushions, lulled by the easy motion of the punt, cheered by the sun, sucking at a pipe that reposed on the pillow by his cheek. There were yet many points to settle in regard to Tatham. Was it, then, so hard to be both charitable and human ? Would no one ever be able to pick out the bad parts of Bobby ? Would Keddy himself ever be able to attempt that work of reformation, supposing some day he wanted to. But he could not keep his mind to these deep subjects on an afternoon like this. He turned the other way, curled himself again, and let his gaze go wandering down the stream, past Bobby, standing in the stern, to the railway bridge, the island, and the fields. Certainly, as a figure in the foreground, Bobby was a better sight than Tatham. Tatham had not been exactly at his best, and Bobby was. Keddy knew it. He was something of a connoisseur of Bobby, and was not unconscious of the fact. He knew his times and seasons. He knew the blaze of wrath that was horrid, yet so fine a picture. He knew the frowning silence that meant worry. He knew the opening of the eyes that came with fighting, the tightening of the lips that meant efficient work conversationally or otherwise. And he knew the present mood, this slow and rhythmic silence. Bobby, he knew, was glad that Tatham had left them. The pole went down into the river, the punt moved again beneath the gentle force of muscle, the pole came out, and the water sprinkled from it, pleasing Bobby's eye. He said nothing. He bent his body to the easy work ; he stood again luxuriously straight, and presently he bent once more. Not another soul was on the river ; never an inch did the punt go other than where he wished it. And he, the fields, the glistening water stretching backwards, made it hard to keep one's mind on things like Tatham and his machine-made charities.

At last the long silence was broken.

‘Keddy!’

Indeed it was well, before addressing Keddy, to say something that would arouse attention. The favourite of fortune was not particularly on the spot. Four cushions ministered to his comfort, and he liked cushions. The thin smoke curled out of his nostrils, and he liked smoke. The warm sun played upon his face. He liked that too, and though beneath their half-closed lids his eyes were set on Wilton as much as on anything, it was well for that interesting person to awake him by name before spending more words upon him.

‘You’ll come down into Somerset for July, won’t you?’

‘What, to stay with you?’

Truly, to him that hath shall be given, regardless of deserts. Tatham was still bobbing up and down along the tow-path above Iffley, his wet clothes drying on a body that would spend July in Kensington.

‘Well, should I enjoy it? What would you do to amuse me? What would it be like? Arthur wants me to go to him for July.’

‘Damn Arthur!’ said Wilton with finality.

‘I wonder if I’d rather stay with you or Arthur.’

And Keddy did really wonder, while the long grass waved softly in the sun between the short knob-headed trees that line the river-bank. At which of those houses in Somerset, not three miles apart, would he spend a month? Would he stay with the old friend or the new? Quite apart from anything Mr. Carpenter might say, the matter was one for serious consideration. But it was none the less convenient a weapon for teasing.

‘Next week, when the term ends, I go to my aunt in London till the end of June,’ he remarked. ‘I shan’t be bored there. Then in August, when the school holidays begin, I go to Scotland with my people. I shan’t be bored there either. There’s just July to fill in. I don’t want to be bored in July. And I rather like staying at the Pollocks’, you know.’

‘Well, you can’t go there this time,’ said Wilton. ‘And you won’t be bored at our place. I’d wring your neck if you were. You will come, won’t you?’

Keddy was amused, and for a moment silent.

'Who'll be there?' he asked presently.

'No one. Only my grandfather, and my mother, and my cousin—she's a girl of nineteen. And some people will come and stay now and then.'

The next minute the hanging leaves of a big tree brushed over Keddy's face and passed along the punt. They were in the shade, the punt was against the bank, and Wilton dug the pole into the river bed that they might keep their place. Down on the cushion opposite Keddy he sat cross-legged, lit a cigarette, and was happy.

'Lord, it will be ripping,' he said.

'What will?'

'July,' said Wilton.

'Oh, *that*,' Keddy answered, and clearly he was going to affect the greatest scorn of a whole dull month in the apple-bearing west. No one except Keddy would have had the bad taste to affect anything, unless it were sympathy, at a time like this. Rather would they have found in that cool half-hour in the shade by Iffley mill something to be respected and remembered. Tathams and Carpenters had desired to see this day, and had not seen it. For now did the sinner play with virtue, and the outcast in his happiness came wonderfully near to pleading.

'Keddy, we shall be out of Oxford, and we'll forget all about it. We'll go and dip in the pond every morning, and dawdle over breakfast, and ride, and read novels, and there's a bit of fishing too, and lots of bunnies to shoot, and we can play billiards and get fat. It'll be ripping.'

'I never heard anything so disgracefully dull in my life,' said Keddy. But he shifted his head to get a better view of Wilton's face. Wilton was looking out towards the falling water at the weir, and was not to be put off by contemptuous interjections.

'We'll wear old clothes and pot at the bunnies, and the Vicarage girls will make eyes at us, and make us play tennis. I'm rather a blood at tennis, you know. And we'll hang about and eat gooseberries, and make the stable-boys fight. Oh, damn it! there's nothing like the



place where you were a kid. I've not been there since last summer.'

'I tell you what it is,' Keddy observed: 'if you're going in for this sort of thing, the man you want to have staying with you is Tatham. He'd do magnificently—he would really. I'll tell him about the bunnies and the Vicarage girls. Go on; tell me some more.'

'We shall be out of Oxford,' said Wilton.

'But I like Oxford,' said Keddy.

'God's curse upon it!'

A simple magnificence, a fine completeness, a heart-whole self-assurance, were the marks of Wilton's greater moments.

'I hate Oxford. I loathe the pious swine. I detest the drunken women-haters. I abominate the whole bally show.'

Could anything have been more comprehensive? There seemed no point where argument could get in edge-ways against a declaration so fervid and final. To defend the pious swine Keddy made no attempt; but he stood up for Delville and good-nature, and as devil's advocate he enjoyed himself enormously.

'I'm sick of them all,' said Wilton again. 'I'm sick of not being able to walk across the quad without some beast looking at me out of the corner of his eye. I want Somerset, and this—and you.'

He waved his hand at the weir, the lock, the fields beyond.

'The more I see of you, the more I hate Arthur and the more Delville bores me. I want to kick about the fields with you. You're the only man I care about, and the only man who cares a damn for me. You're the only thing I haven't made an utter mess of.'

And this on the day of Tatham's martyrdom!

But Keddy stood up in the punt.

'Get up,' he said imperiously. 'Go and lie on those cushions while I punt you home. If you say another word of that idiotic sentimentality, I shall be sick. I've never had such a boring afternoon in all my life.'

He stepped beside Wilton, and pulled the pole from the mud.

'Where's my coat?' said Wilton, getting up in dreamy obedience. 'Oh, Tatham! And, damn it! that telegram too.'

Back went the pole into the mud.

'Bobby, what *was* that telegram?'

'It's not interesting. Look here, I'm cold; I can't wear Tatham's wet rag; give me your coat while you're punting.'

Keddy gave the coat, stood up in the stern with his arms folded, and put the question once more.

'I want to know what was in that telegram.'

'Oh, it's all boring; it's one of the things I'm sick of. I don't want to spoil all this by talking about that.'

'It was from the Oakes woman,' said Keddy, who could never be brought to call that lady by any other name.

'Damn her!' said Wilton.

Such was the spirit of the time. Down on the cushions he threw himself, buttoned up the coat, flung the end of his cigarette in the water, and the last long blow of smoke was followed by the same words, 'Damn her!'

It was an arrangement, he said. It had been arranged for weeks. He could not get out of it. Nor, indeed, would he care to if he could. He was not fond of going back on things he had settled to put through. He had a passion for completeness.

'Well, and what is it to be?' said Keddy.

It was a cottage at Wytham. Miss Oakes and her father were coming down at the end of next week to stay at Wytham for a few days. Delville and some of the others would assist. And on Monday next the girl herself was coming for the afternoon to look at the cottage and say if it would do. That was what the telegram said. But oh, for heaven's sake, let them not worry their heads about such things at a time like this.

'And is the Oakes woman coming to Somerset?' said Keddy, meaning to be unkind. But Wilton's answer was serious.

'No, she isn't. No more than Arthur or Curly or Porker or any other devil in Oxford.'

Still the pole remained in the mud, and Keddy with

his arms folded. Slowly and judiciously he made a pronouncement.

'There's one thing about you, Bobby ; you do make vice seem horrid.'

'So do you,' Wilton answered.

'I can imagine myself hating Arthur or Porker or Curly,' said Keddy ; 'but sooner than punish them by going about with those women, I'd—I'd be sick-nurse to a hunchback crippled epileptic in a smelly room.'

Hunchbacks and other diseased persons were things abhorred of Keddy's soul.

'Give me a week, a week from to-day,' Wilton declared, 'and Gertrude Oakes and all the rest of it shall go for ever.'

'A week from to-day ?'

'Yes, that's a promise. I keep my promises.'

For a moment Keddy looked at him. But the position was too good to risk by further talk. Off went the punt to the rollers by Iffley Lock, and there was silence. Across the rollers the familiar reach of the river was before them, round them, behind them, and the punt went pleasantly.

'The telegram will be safe enough,' said Keddy. 'Tatham is all right.'

'Oh, Tatham is all right,' Wilton agreed.

But there was little said between them. The long bridges were passed, the barges drew near, the water rippled against the punt, and there hummed in Keddy's ears the words that would be famous : 'I keep my promises.'

'Let me come and punt,' said Wilton at last.

So they changed, and Keddy lay among the four cushions, whose comfort was the sweeter for the thought that he had Bobby's promise. Other boats were on the river here, a punt or two turning in from the Cherwell, and there were men on the tow-path.

At Salter's they landed, and Wilton in Tatham's wet coat was a sight for Keddy to jeer at. Who but a grateful Tathamite would have worn that coat for Tatham ? No price was too great to pay for being rid of Tatham ; but would Bobby mind going up to college a different way ?

Through the streets they went, up St. Aldate's, up

the road that leads, if you pursue it, to St. Saviour's House. St. Saviour's House was much in Keddy's mind. Who said contamination now ?

Going through the porch of their college, he laid his hand on Wilton's shoulder. 'The telegram ?'

'You go for it,' said Wilton. 'I can't face Tatham's room.'

Keddy found Tatham sitting among obvious traces of his calamity. A fire had been lighted ; the wet clothes were hanging on chairs in front of it. On the table was a tumbler with a spoon inside it, and a bottle of whisky near. Tatham was sitting by the fire, and the room was heavy with what Keddy called a pea-soup smell from the clothes. No precaution had been omitted.

'Well, are you all right ?' he asked, hoping that his beaming smile would pass for mere cheeriness.

Yes, Tatham was all right. Porker Colquhoun had met him coming in, and Porker had been looking after him, as if, indeed, he needed looking after. It was Porker who boiled the water and suggested that strong whisky. There was no harm done. Those clothes would be dry in an hour or two. A pocket-case had been rather spoiled, but the watch seemed uninjured.

Was it that Keddy disliked anything savouring of sick-beds ? Somehow, both in Tatham's room and in his conversation, there were too many scientific details. Once there had been calamity in Bobby's room, but there were no details then. Moreover, punting is fine exercise ; one walks up quickly from the river, and the evening is cool. A splendid lassitude flatters one's senses, and the glory of health is upon one. It was a day of triumph for Keddy. But it had not been much of a day to Tatham. He seemed different, Keddy thought, since his ducking. Efficient he was still, with his whisky gruel and his useful fire and his steaming clothes. But it was not the breezy efficiency of yore. Keddy stood there in prosperity, and knew that he saw a humbled man. An arrogant pity came over him, and the sin of pride was committed. Would Tatham save Bobby ? Would promises be made to Tatham ? Why, thought Keddy, he did not even know

what Bobby looked like on a restive horse ! He did not even like him !

' Oh, the coat, Bobby's coat,' he said ; ' I'll take it over to him.'

' It's all right about that,' Tatham answered ; ' Porker said he was going that way, so he took it across for me.'

Such things are. They are clouds about the size of a man's hand. Keddy was very comfortable in his lassitude, very happy in his victory, but Tatham was avenged for that unspoken exultation.

' Oh, Porker took it, did he ?'

He bit his nails and thought, till Tatham looked curiously at him. Victory has its cares no less than defeat.

' Well, I'm glad you're no worse. I expect those unlucky small boys came off worse than you did. Bobby's neat about things like that.'

Then came Keddy's smile, and Tatham was left alone.

Across the quad, where men from tennis and cricket stood about, Keddy went with quickening steps. Over by the hall there was Wilton talking with Delville. They parted, and Keddy ran. At the foot of Wilton's staircase he overtook him.

' What, no coat ?'

' It's all right ; it's in your room,' said Keddy. And in his heart there was an unwillingness to say more.

Well, Wilton was glad the coat was recovered. He thought Tatham must have refused to give it up, like the woman in that novel about Cecil Rhodes. ' If he wants the documents, let him come himself and ask for them.'

' If I'd been Rhodes, I'd have wrung her neck. Oh, Keddy, when he turned up at the island this afternoon, I very nearly got straight up and chucked him into the water. It was only those boys who saved us from having him with us the whole way back. I swear if he does it again I'll knock him down. What would he say ? What do you think he'd say ?'

' He'd say——' And Keddy stopped. He did not seem to know what exactly would happen in those circumstances, charming though they were. His mind was following another track.

'Damn his interference!' Wilton continued. 'He nearly spoilt the best afternoon I've had this term. Why can't he leave my telegrams alone?'

'Bobby, what did that telegram actually say?' Keddy asked.

Then Wilton put his hand on Keddy's shoulder, and there was reproach in his voice.

'Won't you leave that alone. It spoils things if you will go on about it.'

'I know, I know,' said Keddy. 'I do want to leave it alone; but—Bobby—what happened was that Porker found your coat in Tatham's room, and Tatham let him bring it over here.'

Surely, as Bobby said, it had been the best afternoon that term. There had been victory, and something better. For Keddy had seen a great new side of Bobby's nature. The last of the spikiness had vanished utterly. The sun had shone. The hours had been soft as those cushions, pleasant as those pipes. So had been the friend himself. But now, once more, he was only the handsomest man in the college and the devil in a fight.

They were in the room. Wilton flung his hat on the table.

'That man!' he cried. 'God curse him. If he has—if he dares—'

'Oh, Bobby, don't be a fool. It's only just a possible chance. It's not worth thinking about. I only thought I ought to let you know.'

Keddy stood on the hearthrug, shifting from leg to leg. The clock had run back days and weeks. From the coat on the table Wilton brought the telegram.

'Well, at least he hasn't bagged it,' he said. 'Here it is. "Arrive Monday one o'clock, to inspect Wytham, GERTRUDE OAKES." Yes, I suppose that's enough to put the devil on the scent.'

Dark red and black came out upon his face; he was always a man of colour.

'He's done it; yes, of course he's done it. Do you think Porker'd let a coat of mine get out of his hands without looking for documents?'

He strode to the window, spitting curses, lashing up his resolution. Keddy said it was ridiculous. Why should Porker have thought of documents at all? Why should he read another man's telegrams? It would be dead against his own principles.

'It's not against his practice, or I'll eat my hat,' Wilton retorted. 'Well, let him try. Let him come and plant his damned carcase in the cottage next door. I'll not budge an inch, not if I have to walk through him. Does he think he's going to pit his wits against yours and mine?'

Yours and mine! Keddy made no comment. But then he did not think that Colquhoun could have read that telegram.

On the table was a letter lying unopened. Wilton took it, opened it savagely, and read. On the sofa Keddy stretched himself out and fought for consolation. Whether or no the secret had been read, the bare suggestion had proved enough to break the spell of the afternoon. Anger, challenge, pugnacity, the things that were wearisome, had come to season the one last week that Bobby had reserved before his promise should come true. Well, so let it be, thought Keddy. By his own word pledged to Arthur and to Carpenter, by his conduct towards Bobby, he, at least, was not to be mixed up in these affairs. Friendship and the famous promise, the bright prospects of bunnies and old clothes in Somerset, these he had purchased with the price of tolerance, and he would still be tolerant.

'Poor old Bobby! Never mind, you'll beat Porker all right, even if he has read it.'

Wilton laid the letter on the table. He scratched his chin. He watched it where it lay.

'And now my mamma—she says she's coming down on Monday. Gertrude and my mamma; my mamma and Gertrude.'

The combination did not sound propitious. It suggested what Keddy might have smiled at had it not been for Wilton's face.

'Things seem to be pointing against the Oakes woman and her visit,' he observed.

'Do they? Do they? Then the sooner they point the other way the better.'

Again Wilton strode from the window to the door, from the door to the window. There was truculence in his manner; fate and Colquhoun were equally out of favour. But fate, no less than the man, had Vitality against it.

'Keddy, this is difficult, but it's got to be done.'

Tolerance was sympathetic, and condoled from among the cushions.

'The Oakes woman must be put off.'

'I can't do that,' said Wilton. 'She won't come to Wytham without engaging the house herself. Besides, if I put her off, she'd be wild. She likes to come first.'

'Then you'd better put Mrs. Wilton off.'

'It's her only day. She's coming up to London and taking Oxford on the way.'

But still, to the business-like Keddy, it seemed that she had better not come at all than walk on one side of Bobby with Miss Oakes on the other.

'You must stop her, Bobby.'

'I won't,' said he, and Keddy never combated announcements made in the manner of that one.

'God damn it!'

Keddy could not quite account for his annoyance on this point. The thing seemed simple. The Oakes woman could be taken in tow by Delville.

But she and Delville were not good friends. They had indeed been very good friends in the past. But Bobby's coming had made a difference. Gertrude would not spend a day alone with Delville now.

So Keddy suggested other names, names that Pollock would have shuddered to hear. And it was no good. He learned that it was not everyone who could be trusted to have sole possession of this treasure for a summer day.

Then Vitality came close, close as Mr. Carpenter, and stood over Keddy with pale eyes looking straight.

'I'm in a hole. I won't put off Gertrude, because it would mess up everything. I won't put off my mother—because I'm not going to.'

Alas for Colquhoun and the coat! Was it not possible,



thought Keddy, that but for him some other influence might have worked. Was it possible that Mrs. Wilton's letter might have been Miss Oakes's death-warrant? Bobby was fond of his mother. But Bobby hated Colquhoun, and Bobby hated opposition.

'Do you see, Keddy? I've got to find someone to take Gertrude out to Wytham.'

There was not much for Tolerance to say to that. And Vitality was close, its knees were pressing against Keddy's side as he lay on the sofa. His eyes were fast on the ceiling, his mind on the day when he pledged his faith to Mr. Carpenter that he would keep himself from touching Bobby's vices. A cloud of sulkiness settled on his face. He had not looked thus when he heard of the bunnies and old clothes in the dull county of Somerset, nor when Bobby gave his promise. He had not looked thus when he triumphed over Tatham. Perhaps, after all, his dislike of Tatham had been partly due to jealousy of the man who would run Bobby to improvement. Well, Tatham would not drink out of Bobby's tea-cup, and Keddy would. So Keddy had beaten Tatham. But what were the fruits of the victory?

Suddenly he jumped up. He stood on the hearthrug. His sulkiness turned almost to rudeness.

'Look here. I'll do this for you. I'll look after your mother. We can find a reason why you aren't there. You can take that woman to Wytham and then join us.'

'There won't be time for that,' Wilton answered.

'Well, then, I'll explain that you've missed a train or something. I'll look after your mother all right.'

Keddy did not like the look he had from Wilton then. Wilton answered him quietly.

'It's no good your trying to make plans for me, Keddy. I make my own plans, and I'm not going to be put off by your damned fastidiousness. I'm going to spend Monday with my mother. There, read her letter.'

He pointed to it as it lay on the table. And Keddy very slowly, very sullenly, went over and took it, and stood there as he read it.

## CHAPTER XI

### A PAWN IN THE GAME

'YES,' said Mr. Carpenter, 'one of the very happiest cases I remember developed in exactly the same way.'

He took off his shovel hat. The welcome breeze blew cool upon his brow and the tails of his long black coat flapped busily above the dusty road.

'It was at one of these army coaching places ; I always have disliked them, you know. I knew there'd be trouble as soon as I heard they'd sent him there.'

'Who ?' asked the listener who tramped the road beside him.

'Who ? Oh, he was one of my boys, a dear boy, but, my word ! he was a Tartar. Three months, I said to myself, when I heard he had gone to that place at Brighton, three months, and I shall hear of you again, young man. And I did. Such a mess you never saw ! Widowed mother half demented, army coach storming with rage, guardian threatening the colonies and gripping his stick—oh, a pretty kettle of fish ! I saw exactly how it was. It's like typhoid fever, Pollock, the disease goes on till the crisis comes, and then it's either recovery or—the end of the chapter. Either you make a new start now, my good boy, I said to myself, or we've seen the last of *you*. There they were, his mother imploring him with tears, the guardian storming and threatening, all of them wrong, hopelessly wrong. I just took him straight out for a walk on the parade and talked to him. I didn't mince matters. I told him everything straight out, and called a spade a spade. One doesn't like doing it ; it's

not always the right way, but sometimes it has to be done. I think that young man had a time he won't forget in a hurry. And now he's an officer in the Guards, and no one has anything good enough to say for him.'

Mr. Carpenter replaced his hat and sighed a long sigh of pleasing reminiscence. This was Monday, and if there was one day in the seven which he allowed to pass in something like idleness, Monday was that day. It followed on the lightning phases of his sabbath. It was a day of cool reaction. It was the day for a long walk, a walk which might have been more restful, but could not have been more pleasant, had it not been for the happy chance which joined him with Arthur Pollock by the railway station. Hurriedly and anxiously had Pollock questioned himself before he accepted the invitation that followed. But here he was, on a country road with a member of St. Saviour's House, his self-respect but little the worse, his social instincts positively gratified.

Moth-like, he had flown at once to the flame which attracted and scorched him. From Mr. Carpenter, if from anyone, sympathy should come. And as he rained his blows of anger on the interesting bitter topic, it seemed to the clergyman that the young man's legs grew longer, thinner, swifter, and the afternoon more hot.

'Don't think I haven't understood it all along,' said Pollock. 'I know the attraction of a man like Wilton well enough. Great Heavens, haven't I felt it myself? My people have a little house in the next village to theirs in Somerset. I've known him as long as I can remember. He was always the same. He would stand up to a couple of boys twice his own size and when you picked him up he'd be ready to fly at you for having seen him beaten. That's the sort of thing that got hold of Keddy. Keddy's life had been so quiet. Oh, it was such a miserable pity he never went to school. He hadn't been up here three weeks before he found out that Bobby was the most exciting man in the place. Then came that stupid business when they wrecked his room, and as luck would have it, the first person to find him afterwards was Keddy. Keddy was sharp enough to see that he was behaving

decently in an awkward situation, and went stark staring mad about him at once. It's enough to put an angel out of temper.'

And there descended on a passing dragon-fly, through Pollock's stick, the measure of his wrath.

'Nothing can make him see, nothing, that the man is low, low through and through in everything except manners and physical courage.'

'Don't you think, Pollock, don't you think perhaps if we tried to think more—more broadly about Wilton——?'

That was the kind of remark to which Pollock, in talking with Mr. Carpenter, had contracted a habit of not replying.

So the tale of Keddy's affairs continued, was carried down to the memorable night of Angel Square and the precious guarantees that Keddy gave thereafter. When the night had been darkest, dawn was near. Then it was that Mr. Carpenter had supplied a parallel from the affair at Brighton. In each case the evil had been stayed.

'And now,' said he, taking Pollock by the arm and stopping his walk, 'a very serious question arises. Here's the turning. To the left Cumnor, and home the way we've come; to the right Wytham, and back by Godstow and the upper river. Which shall it be?'

'I should say Wytham and the river,' Pollock answered. 'But there are at least seven places on the way where hateful old men open gates for you and expect coppers. That's what I can't stand.'

Merrily did Mr. Carpenter greet such a comic prejudice.

He laughed his high-pitched laugh, and pulled at Pollock's arm. 'Dear me, dear me! What ideas you have! Come, you shall leave the hateful old men to me.'

For form's sake, and for the love of being coaxed, Pollock protested as he went. But Wytham was the choice, and to Wytham they walked on that day of relaxation that followed the sabbath. For a space they trudged along in silence. To their left was the wooded slope that leads to Wytham Park. And sure enough, ten minutes had not passed before the first gate was reached.

'Here, now, if your hateful old man doesn't turn out to be an old woman!' Mr. Carpenter laughed.

She was not the less hateful for that, thought Pollock. Very old and bent and decrepit she looked. She curtsied to Mr. Carpenter and thanked him kindly.

'What a life!' Pollock exclaimed.

'Yes,' said the clergyman shortly. He was quite above affecting sympathy for persons whose fate did not interest him in the least.

'Everywhere,' said Pollock, 'where you have an educational place, you're sure to have beggars. Men at Oxford are bad enough, schoolboys are worse. No beggar appeals in vain.'

'Ah, the young rascals!' Mr. Carpenter's voice sounded full and strong. 'They'll learn the value of money some day. Still, the prudent economical boy, Pollock, you know he's not the one we really like, now, is he?'

So the second and the third of the gates were passed, and conversation flagged not. The topics of Mr. Carpenter, if not many, were recurring and complete. Long study had been spent upon them. They were the business and the pleasures of his life. And all around was the beauty of the day, the woods on one side and the water on the other. This way men choose for riding; there is turf, and the road lies bare upon the green slopes. At Wytham there should be tea, it was decided, and the pleasing prospect settled down upon them.

'I half hope that Malcolm may spend July with me in Yorkshire,' said Mr. Carpenter, led on by thoughts of country walks and teas at village inns.

'I'm afraid I am your rival,' said Pollock. 'I asked him to come down to Somerset. But we needn't quarrel, for I hear we're both thrown overboard for Wilton.'

'He's going to stay with Wilton?'

'For the whole of July,' said Pollock.

Mr. Carpenter whistled.

'Is that definitely settled?'

'Unless you can stop it. I can't.'

'H'm,' said Mr. Carpenter.

'We have much to be thankful for,' he added.

Now to a precise thinker like Pollock it is impossible to deny assertions like this one, and not agreeable to assent. But Wytham was near, and tea.

'Dangers we have always with us,' Mr. Carpenter observed. 'The truth is we shall never see the day in this life when all dangers are removed. It would be funny, wouldn't it, if we did. And Malcolm really is a person who goes to meet dangers half way. But I can tell you one thing about him. He has not actually been damaged yet. When he comes and talks to me I'm sure of it, sure of it. He couldn't look at me as he does if the damage had been done. Now I don't know much about many things, but I think I do know something about boys and young men, and I tell you that is so. He has kept his promise.'

Pollock's reply was as near to a sniff as civility permitted.

'Yes, Keddy talks now as if he were going to reform the fellow.'

'Stranger things have happened, Pollock,' said the clergyman gravely. 'Now there's the inn. Shall it be there? Will they give us a good tea?'

Pollock thought they could do no better, and the point was determined.

'Yes, yes,' said Mr. Carpenter, back again in his reflections. 'Yes, things turn out curiously, don't they? It's not only by preaching and management that we influence others. There's prayer, Pollock, isn't there? In most of the cases I have known——'

Suddenly Pollock seized his arm.

'Mr. Carpenter! For goodness' sake take care where you're going. Here, let's turn back at once.'

'Good gracious me, what is it?' cried Mr. Carpenter.

'Didn't you see? There's Colquhoun in the front window of the inn. If he'd seen us we might have had to have tea with him and walk all the way home on either side of him. We can't go to the inn. Why, he was looking out of the window. Merciful heavens, what an escape!'

Mr. Carpenter ha-ha'd in tones that contrasted curiously with Pollock's unaffected agitation.

'There's a providence above us,' said the latter, cooling down. They were retracing their steps.

'Is there? Well, that's a discovery for a summer day, indeed. But are we to have no tea?'

'We'll find some friendly woman,' said Pollock. 'Here, we'll see if they'll give us tea at that little cottage with the leaded windows. Oh Lord, Colquhoun! Do think.'

In this strange world our clouds have silver linings more often than we guess. The Church has a duty to preach this lesson. And Mr. Carpenter neglected not that duty. He and his nerve-worn companion passed through the low-roofed busy kitchen of the cottage, dealt skilfully with the timid woman found therein, and were grateful for the chance that brought them here. From the kitchen they were taken to the parlour; tea was promised; and both of them rejoiced emphatically in the things that were. They liked the room, the woman, her food, her chairs, and even her taste in decoration. Not a wax flower, said Pollock, not a single one. Nor a funeral card, said Mr. Carpenter, for whom death had no black edges. The long low window looked out on the road towards the inn. But it was dangerous to be too near it, lest Colquhoun should see his chance of companionship. A black oak dresser held cups and plates. A broad and bending beam kept up the fly-covered ceiling. The fireplace was a cavern in the whitewashed wall. And at the table in the middle the travellers sat down to tea and jam in chairs that neither rocked nor swayed. Nothing at the inn could have been better than this.

It is curious to see how the sanest of men, the scientist with his causes and effects, the Christian with his full moral responsibility, are swept away at moments to a belief in some form of intervention from above. The very words we use to describe the more wonderful and extraordinary parts of our experience imply that they have been touched by a power outside the course of nature. Nor does the power appear always to work with benevolence. Mr. Carpenter, indeed, was one who saw the interposition of providence where others might

only have seen that Wytham was a natural place to walk to. But Pollock, even Pollock, recognized a power that intervened. He called it his luck. It had a single simple purpose in its workings, which was to lead him at all times to positions of discomfort. 'My luck,' he said, looking back on the list of chances which took him to Wytham and a tragedy. 'The providence of God,' said Mr. Carpenter, 'directed my footsteps to-day.'

For it came about that as the old grandfather clock was approaching the hour of five, Mr. Carpenter leant forward and laid one finger on the tablecloth.

'Pollock,' he said, 'what was that?'

A voice, a voice with a questioning accent, had reached them through the thin, ill-fitting door that led to the kitchen. 'Mrs. Cobbs?' it said.

'Now this is really delightful,' said Mr. Carpenter. 'That was Malcolm's voice.'

Pollock thought not. He craned his neck to see through the window into the road.

'There's a horse and trap standing outside,' he said.

Mr. Carpenter raised his finger to command silence. He listened, listened with ears and eyes, mouth open and neck inclined, while their hostess hurried in from the yard to the kitchen and wearily acknowledged her identity.

'Now, I'm afraid you'll think us very troublesome, but we've come on a matter of business, Mrs. Cobbs. My friend Mr. Wilton has been negotiating with you about letting this cottage to me this week, and before I close with you, I should like to see over it.'

'Well, that was not Malcolm, at any rate,' said Mr. Carpenter quietly. Whoever the first speaker had been, this one who spoke now with light and trusting cheeriness, who came to business briskly, who dealt airily with Mrs. Cobbs's poor-spirited reluctance, was a woman.

There was no more tea drunk in the low-roofed parlour; no more bread and jam was eaten. Mr. Carpenter jumped to no conclusions. But the shades of anxiety gathered on his brow.

'That was not Keddy's voice,' said Pollock, in the silly manner of a child refusing medicine.



Mr. Carpenter made no reply. He was wiping his glasses attentively, and in the next room the negotiations continued between the two women, the dreary and the gay.

'Well,' said Mrs. Cobbs, 'it's a poor place for a lady to stay in.'

And the answer she had was not to be mistaken, the boyish voice, the clear tones, the smooth sincerity.

'I'm sure it's very nice.'

'Merciful heavens !' said Pollock in terror. He pushed back his chair, half rose, and fixed his gaze on the offending door that let those sounds come in. The crisis shows the man. Mr. Carpenter moved not a muscle, but softly polished his glasses and kept his powder dry.

'Come, Pollock, come,' he said. 'What ever is the matter ?'

'Are you from Oxford, miss ?' Mrs. Cobbs was asking in the other room.

'From London ; my name is Oakes. And now, if it isn't giving you too much trouble, we should like to see round the house.'

That was the woman's voice again, gay and sympathetic, and Pollock fairly jumped out of his chair. Here was his luck once more ! He was trapped, a prisoner, and nothing now could save him from a situation that would be torture.

'Mr. Carpenter—do you realize—do you see ? This is Keddy with one of Wilton's women, with Miss Oakes.'

But he got little comfort from the clergyman, who had no leisure for soothing the nerves of a wholly irrelevant person.

'They will come in here, *in here*, Mr. Carpenter !'

Mr. Carpenter replaced his glasses, set his lips, and poured out another cup of tea. At such unfeeling coolness Pollock could have screamed.

'And this,' said Mrs. Cobbs, 'is the parlour. There's two gentlemen at tea in here.'

How many excellent principles may break down in one instant ! 'Keep the boy from any sustained exertion,' the doctor had instructed Mrs. Forth, 'and from any sudden shock.' The doctor looked wise as he said

it ; Mrs. Forth looked earnest as she promised. 'Whatever you do,' Pollock once advised Keddy, 'even if you do get into some mess with Bobby, for Heaven's sake keep Carpenter out of it. Once you get those parsons down on your peccadilloes, it's awful.' And Wilton, too, had issued precepts. 'Don't make a mess of it, Keddy,' he said that morning. 'Well ; I know you won't.' All these warnings were laid to heart by Keddy. But there was not one of them that rose again to check him on his way from the kitchen to the parlour. In single file they entered ; Mrs. Cobbs the innocent, Miss Oakes the unconscious, and Keddy the unsuspecting. The disaster was complete in an instant. Mr. Carpenter pressed his lips more firmly ; Pollock scowled down at his plate ; and the boy paid the tribute of a sweeping crimson blush.

The black dresser stood near the door. Keddy leant against it and smiled. It was all that he could do.

'Hullo,' he said ; 'what a funny thing to find you here.'

Even Pollock felt better for hearing that quiet remark. Mr. Carpenter answered pleasantly. He rose from the chair, and Pollock, with perceptible protest, did the same. So much was conceded in civility to the friend of Wilton, as she stood, a trim figure in white serge, surveying and admiring the room.

'We'd make it look better with a dust and a few flowers,' said Mrs. Cobbs despondingly.

The grandfather clock struck five.

'What a pretty clock !' said the intending tenant, and her words were addressed, with aplomb not wholly unconscious, to Mr. Carpenter, who stood near her.

'Very pretty, very,' said he.

She looked at him quickly. It could not have been in his civil tones that she found what checked her light, appealing gaiety. She seemed to say suddenly, 'Why do you hurt me ?' But then, Mr. Carpenter's eyes were very keen and brisk.

She was pretty. The shade of timidity became her, had there been anyone present to appreciate the fact. Prettily she looked at Keddy, and he came obediently forward.

'I like it,' she said to him. 'And I know my father will like it very much.'

Obedying her suggestion he looked round the room and liked it too. Though the crimson colour remained on his face, though his left hand held his cap with fingers working nervously, yet the picture was complete, the reproof of the clergyman, the appeal of the woman, the protection of the boy.

'And the fireplace is lovely ! Now let us see the rooms upstairs.'

So they left the parlour in the same order, Mrs. Cobbs the first, Keddy the last, and between them the girl in white serge, small in stature, neat in dress, childish in face and manner, but, the bearer of the plague.

Mr. Carpenter did not sit down again. Backwards and forwards he walked beneath the low white roof while Pollock sat silent and writhed.

'To stop him now would be useless—useless,' he muttered.

'A friend of Wilton's, Pollock ? Did you say she was a friend of Wilton's ?'

'My patience !' Pollock moaned, 'didn't she say so herself ? Wilton—Delville—I don't know exactly who she belongs to. Her name is Oakes. Don't you remember their climbing out to Angel Square ?'

Mr. Carpenter whistled, and resumed his walk.

'My goodness ! This is serious !'

In the next room the negotiations went forward.

'On Wednesday, then, at about three o'clock,' Miss Oakes repeated. 'I shall come with my father, and we shall stay till Friday, or perhaps longer. And I'm sure we shall be very comfortable indeed. Good-bye ; thank you very much.'

'On Wednesday, on Wednesday,' said Mr. Carpenter below his breath.

'With her father ! Oh, heavens !' Pollock wailed. Drawn by the wretched fascination of disgust he stood at the window and watched the pair departing. It seemed that that which Keddy's hand had found to do, he did it with his might. 'As if it were his sister,'

thought Pollock in bitter anger. For there was a smile on Keddy's face, and his hand was outstretched from the dog-cart to end that pretty hesitation and help the neat white figure to the seat beside him. He threw a coin and a word to the boy at the horse's head, wheeled round in front of Pollock's window, and was off. Neither then nor when she stood in the parlour had Pollock's unwilling eyes been blind to many hateful details. He had seen enough in the girl herself to make him shudder on any ordinary day. Her heels were a trifle too high, her skirt too short, her hair too low, and her dimples too well regulated. Yet for these offences she escaped his condemnation. He hardly thought of them again, so thoroughly did another aspect dominate his mind. For Pollock had imagination. He had no fear for Keddy's moral welfare, no general dislike of sin. But he saw in that girl a symbol of Wilton's spirit, and he stood on his high place and cursed. It was not so with Mr. Carpenter. The girl had no symbolic importance for him. She was a mere pawn in the game between the devil and himself.

'Wednesday,' he muttered, 'Wednesday, and this is Monday.' And his resolute, cool voice gave Pollock a shock of irritation which he was hardly in a state to bear pleasantly.

'Gracious heavens!' he cried, 'I believe you think—I believe you imagine—— Mr. Carpenter, do let me make you understand, this is Wilton's affair, not Keddy's. Don't you see what's happened? Wilton had something else on hand, another woman, I suppose, and Keddy had to look after this one. There's been some accident, and Keddy is called in to help. Oh Lord, it's sickening enough as it is. But, for Heaven's sake, don't go away with the idea——'

As a matter of fact, Mr. Carpenter was going away with no ideas one way or the other. He kept an open mind. It was enough for him to see the course that common-sense commanded in a crisis which nothing could save from being awful. But it was not he that cut short Pollock's exhortation.

Three thundering blows descended on the cottage door

from a heavy-headed stick. Pollock nearly jumped out of his skin. Mr. Carpenter stopped his walk. They could hear Mrs. Cobbs rushing in from the back kitchen.

‘Now, my good woman,’ said a voice that seemed to Pollock to be interposed at all the severest nervous crises of his life—‘Now, my good woman, just answer my questions. You’ve had a gentleman and a lady here. What did they want with you?’

One point there is about the more insufferable dwellers on this globe—they do produce concord among their fellow men, and the blessing of the peacemakers should be theirs. The intrusion of Mr. Colquhoun at this particular crisis in Keddy’s affairs and Pollock’s afflictions was equally unwelcome to both of them. Pollock sat down and resigned himself to anything that the tormentor might now devise. Mr. Carpenter stood shaking his head distressfully at such an unlucky complication. Not a word escaped their hearing. They heard Colquhoun assure Mrs. Cobbs that it was no use her humming and hawing with him. They heard her reply, with the genius for prevarication that animates the lower classes, that a clergyman and a gentlemen were taking tea in the parlour, seemingly part and parcel of the whole affair, and Colquhoun was invited to inspect them if he cared. So Pollock was in a fair way to be found with a parson in the recesses of Delville’s secret place, and the prospect hardly stirred him, because, like a dog that is beaten over much, he cared not for further blows. Delville was the woman’s reference thrown out to appease the inquisitor. Mr. Delville would speak for her. His sisters had stayed at that cottage. And the lady from London was coming on Wednesday. She herself, Mrs. Cobbs, oh, she would sleep at a neighbour’s. The lady’s name was Oakes, she thought, or Soakes. And the gentleman, no, she had never seen him there before.

‘I think the fat’s in the fire now,’ said Pollock, when the interview was over. ‘Now that Colquhoun’s on the scent there’s no saving. Keddy. The story will be all over the college—Keddy and Bobby, Keddy and Delville, Keddy and that crew. Oh God, what a mess, what filth!’

'I am sorry Mr. Colquhoun came here,' said Mr. Carpenter, 'very sorry. I am afraid it may be serious for Malcolm. But that must not make us forget what is far more serious. Malcolm must be found, and found at once.'

They did but give time for Colquhoun to get away before they paid their debt, and started to walk back to Oxford. It was like the walk back from a funeral. The half miles they told off with observations elaborately trivial. The burning thought was wisely left unmentioned. For their sympathies had parted, Pollock harking back to vain lamentations, and Mr. Carpenter reaching forward to those desperate remedies with which great men meet desperate cases. So Pollock returned to college, and Mr. Carpenter sat down at his writing-table at St. Saviour's House.

It was past nine o'clock, the bell of Tom Tower had rung out its number, when Pollock found Keddy, and learned that his diagnosis of the case was right. Keddy's room he had found empty; there was no sign of him about the place. But there was a light in Wilton's room while the porter said Wilton himself was not in college. So Pollock controlled himself, gathered up his skirts, and went. He did not wonder at Keddy's lurking in a friendly room that night. He only thanked heaven that Wilton should be out at the theatre, that his mother was staying in Oxford for the night.

'Won't you come over to my room?' he asked.

'I'd rather stay here,' said Keddy.

So there it had to be, with the lie of the ground against him, and Pollock sat down wearily. Had he been able to join battle in his own room he would have taken strength from his surroundings. Pictures of old school groups would have shown him Keddy and himself together in a past that had no clouds. The walls would have seemed to echo old talks in which he held the lead, in which his kindly dominance had moulded and checked the boy who had never been to school. Or in Keddy's room, where Pollock had been at his ease, amid photographs of a family that stood for what was fair, in that

room also the advantage would have been on his side. But here he seemed to have passed through the mirror to a place in which appearances were the opposite of realities, where fair was foul, and the charm of Oxford hideous. Keddy's pipe was filled from Wilton's jar, his glass from Wilton's bottle, his legs were stretched on Wilton's sofa, and for the first time in two years Pollock found offence in the splendid unconcern that runs with the hospitality of Oxford.

For Keddy was at home in Wilton's room, and his appearance was that of a man at ease. Pollock's spirits sank before the sight. He had a heart, and in his affection he meant this night to be eventful between his friend and him. But it augured ill that Keddy should join battle with his face serene, his body in repose, his manner smooth and quiet with the consciousness of strength.

'After you had promised me, and promised Carpenter, Keddy——'

But Keddy was not so to be abashed. He was sorry. He was not surprised at Pollock's anger. But he did not take on the cast of guilt.

Wilton was indeed a common topic for big talks. There had been the day when Keddy spoke of the outlawry of the man who could gracefully throw cats at Porker's window. It made him feel sick, he said, and he apologized for his eccentric feelings while Pollock had laughed and mocked. There had been another day, when Keddy on the morrow of Angel Square had yielded all except his claim to Wilton's friendship. Then, too, he had been apologetic, almost pleading, and Pollock was his confessor. But he was not apologetic now.

'And only yesterday you told me you were going to make Bobby chuck his vices !'

It was hardly a fair rendering of what Keddy had said, but he did not quarrel with it.

'Did I tell you that ? Well, perhaps I may do it yet. But I'm not much interested in Bobby's vices.'

'His women ?' asked Pollock sadly. 'I suppose you find them as fascinating as Angel Square ?'

'She wasn't half so bad as you'd think,' said Keddy.

'She wasn't really. She was educated in a convent in France. Her father lived at Dieppe. They're staying in London now. She's rather stupid, and she calls Bobby "Bobbie," but really she's not so bad.'

'Not so bad,' he said, and he leaned his head back against the cushion in the corner of Wilton's sofa. But even in the thick of the topic he looked a poor subject for rebukes. His eyes were happy, and his little belt of freckles stood out well. His hair had just been cut, and the clean fair line of it looked cool upon his forehead, fitting close and low. His flannel suit hung loose and easy; he was showing well his own especial grace of looking comfortable.

Thus at his ease he lay while he heard of Colquhoun's exploits at Wytham.

'Porker's like the ten commandments,' he said; 'everything a man ought not to do. But he won't get Bobby's scalp this time.'

'And Carpenter!' said Pollock, who touched shortly and hopelessly the points of a situation where strong words were needless.

A shadow crossed Keddy's face. He would not talk of Carpenter.

'I believe he thought,' Pollock groaned, 'I believe at first he thought it was a woman of yours. Oh God, you may well smile!'

Wearily he rose and poured out whisky, Wilton's whisky, for his need was great. Keddy was difficult to scold that night.

'If only Carpenter were right,' he sighed. 'If only you were going to the devil like a gentleman, instead of acting flunkey to a crew of cads!'

'Not a crew. Only Bobby,' said Keddy with cool accuracy.

'But, Porker, do think, he'll tell everyone. Everyone will know about it.'

'They'll know I'm Bobby's pal,' Keddy answered. 'But they might know that already, if they're clever.'

Bobby's pal! Yes, lying like a friend in Bobby's room. Pollock fell back into his chair, and struggled to be angry.



His eloquence came back at last, but gentle and imploring, not with its old authority. Could he not even now make Keddy see the man as he really was? Might they not examine Bobby once again, and treat him as they treated things of old when they set out together to find the truth of everything in life? Bobby! What was he? A fellow with a straight nose and a head placed prettily on his shoulders. A man who didn't blink if you threatened him, or look undignified if you hurt him. For truth's sake let them pass him for a fellow who would do well in a fight. But it was life, not fighting. What had he done? There had been his life at home, where he gave them gracious patronage in exchange for flattery. There had been his life at school, where he made, perhaps, some sort of a record in swishings. And what else? At Oxford a steady violation of rules of decency that Keddy himself respected, hostility to the men whom Keddy liked, companionship with the men whom Keddy hated! It was not to be denied. It was vice for vice's sake, the principle of the anarchist who hates society because it exists. It was a life swept clean of every element that was beautiful or profitable, a model of all that Keddy admittedly disliked. And oh, it was uncomfortable, Bohemian, blatant, radical, and low. The man was not even clever. He had not the excuse of brilliance or originality. He was Delville's understudy, glad of Delville's cast-off women. He thought it only needed whisky and a woman to turn him out an Alcibiades.

Pollock lay back sighing. There was silence.

'Poor old Bobby,' said Keddy thoughtfully. 'How jolly it would be if you liked him.'

'Oh, Keddy, it's all true. You know you can't deny it.'

Keddy had no answer. Something interesting, something exciting was gathering behind his dreamy eyes.

'And you, Keddy, you, you are that man's underling. You do his work, you manage his women, you let yourself get smeared with his dirt. Oh God, how can you? It isn't as if you were that kind of man. It isn't as if you liked what he does. You're not a Puritan, but you are a gentleman.'

'I may not like what he does,' said Keddy, 'but that's no reason why I shouldn't help him when he asks me.'

'Oh, give to him that asketh, turn your cheek to the smiter!' For the first time there was a sneer in Pollock's voice. 'It's the Sermon on the Mount, is it?'

'Oh, bother the Sermon on the Mount,' said Keddy, to whom it suggested Tatham.

Then the light came into his eyes, and he got up from the sofa. He stood in front of Pollock's chair, looked down at him, thrust his hands into his pockets, and was the most pugnacious Keddy that had ever been seen.

'Arthur, I'm going to make you a speech. You've made me one. Now you shall listen to mine. You've told me what you think of Bobby, and a lot of it is quite true. You want to know why I don't chuck him; you want to know why I do the things he asks. I say it's because I like him, and you say that oughtn't to matter, if I don't like the things he does. And I say I don't care what he does, not a damn, not a damn, not a damn! That girl came down to-day, and so did Mrs. Wilton. Bobby couldn't look after them both. He asked me to manage the Oakes woman. I didn't want to. I told him so. And then he did something; he didn't know what an important thing he was doing. He did it while I was standing there on that hearthrug. And I'm going to do it to you. He didn't understand how important it was, but you shall. It's my argument. It explains everything. The moment I saw it I understood why you are wrong and Carpenter is wrong. I always knew you were. Now I know why.'

There is a story of a British Consul with an eye for the dramatic, who saved the life of a fellow subject condemned to death in South America by spreading the Union Jack on the man's breast, and telling the executioners to 'Fire at that!'

Swiftly Keddy strode to the writing-table where Wilton's correspondence lay about as usual for all the world to respect. The most excellent of conventions may be set aside when David is an hungered. Keddy found the letter he wanted, came back, and stood over Pollock again.

'He made me read this simply to explain why he didn't want to stop his mother coming. It's her letter to him. It came on Saturday. I'll read it to you. You call him a beast, you say he's got nothing good except good looks and pluck. You say he's low and all that, and not clever, and I oughtn't to be his pal unless he drops his vices. Now listen. This is what Mrs. Wilton writes to him. I'll read it.'

He held up the letter. He looked at it, excited, stern, triumphant, with Pollock fairly overborne beneath him.

'It's from Somerset,' he said. 'Oh, damn it, I can't ! You take it and read it.'

If Keddy had been asked to compose a letter from a rather demonstrative widow to an only son he would have written very much what he now gave Pollock to read, and would have laughed at it when he had finished. He did not laugh at the real thing. Even the first words he had found it impossible to read.

For what were the proper names for Wilton ? The Skunk ! That could be put aside perhaps ; it was a term of open hostility. But what names fitted the man in Keddy's own mind. He was the thing that was evil, the mysterious fascinating type of the life that had gleamed so new last autumn. He was Vitality, that had smiled at Keddy in the quad, and made him feel shy. He was the Outlaw, whom they might break but could not bend. He was Bobby, something red and dark and hot that made Keddy ride hard, and walked with a hand pinching his shoulder. But here, in the smooth calm writing laid out to silence Pollock, he was 'my darling boy.'

Let Pollock fire at that.

There was a little news, how Jimmy had been sent back to the vet, and grandpapa wanted a family party in July.

'So you have had a cold. That makes me unhappy. Not one of your bad ones, dearest, I do hope ?'

Had that occurred to Keddy and Pollock while they talked about the man ? Had they wondered, like this letter, if Bobby were doing rash things again, sleeping out in the quad, forgetting to change wet clothes ? Had they thought of that when they watched him lying senseless in his soaking clothes the other night upon his bed ?

‘And oh, my darling, why is Mrs. Pollock talking about you? It makes me think of the old troubles at school. Surely you are not being wild again? I could not bear to think of that. Whatever it is, I know my little boy will tell me. And who is Mr. Forth, I wonder? Is he nice, and should I like him?’

Well, she was going to give herself a treat. She was coming down on Monday. She explained the time and occasion of her visit. Bobby would take her on the river. She might manage to stay the night if he could get her a room at the Clarendon. They would have a day together, something to remember.

‘And now,’ said Keddy, straining at his words, ‘will you think of the state of degradation that woman must have reached when she can write like that to such a man! Shall we make Porker go and give her a piece of his mind? Shall we tell Carpenter to go off at once and save her? She must be pretty well contaminated, mustn’t she? Contaminated like the devil! Up to the eyes in it!’

‘Keddy,’ said his friend, who had never before seen this imperious mood, ‘she’s his mother.’

‘Yes,’ said Keddy, glaring still.

‘And, as a matter of fact, she’s spoilt him hopelessly from the day he was born.’

‘Has she? I don’t care. I don’t care a damn. I don’t care whether it’s right or wrong, or sensible or silly. I know what it is. It’s ripping!’

Pollock looked haggard and desperate. But Keddy’s appearance did not invite any but the gentlest opposition.

‘She’s his mother,’ he pleaded again. ‘You can’t be his mother.’

‘I can’t call him by those names,’ Keddy answered. ‘I can’t stroke his head and all that. But I can do other things.’

Could he, then, not see the difference? Could he not see that a mother’s indulgence was natural, a friend’s pliability mere folly? No! It was no good.

‘The thing is ripping,’ said Keddy slowly. ‘It’s what I like. It’s—it’s beautiful.’

## CHAPTER XII

### A PASSION FOR COMPLETENESS

WHEN Pollock left the room that night, Keddy did not find that time hung heavily. Waiting for Wilton, he lay once more on the sofa, and enjoyed the blessed peace of those who live in the present. His day's work was done, and done well. If accidents had happened, they were for Bobby to deal with. He had trust in Bobby's skill. Ever since Saturday night, when first he saw Mrs. Wilton's letter, he had been extraordinarily happy. That letter seemed to prove the truth of what he had believed so long against them all. It made him feel perfectly sure that his own conduct towards Bobby had been on the lines which he liked and approved in the depths of his soul, and that any other conduct would have been ugly and unpleasant, and visited with remorse. Mrs. Wilton's letter was an almost sacred justification of the affection which suffereth long. It had made Keddy forget his own dislike of going about with the 'Oakes woman.' He had taken charge of her, and had not failed Bobby at the pinch. Mr. Carpenter must have an explanation, of course ; but that was all.

Wilton came back towards midnight, very cheerful. He was in evening dress, had dined and been to the theatre with his mother, about whom he had a good deal to say. Keddy listened in complete satisfaction. He did not in the least wish to hasten the questions about Wytham which Wilton would surely remember to ask. Wilton was full of other things, and Keddy's cool ungushing sympathy continued. He learned that in July they

must do something to give Mrs. Wilton a rather better time than she'd been having lately. She was looking old. Nearer sixty than fifty she was, in fact, and she never got on too well with the grandfather. There's nothing like these women who are soldier's wives or widows, Wilton said. You can talk sense to them. They understand things. But he wished she'd had a daughter to make her life more interesting. Indeed, in a breezy after-dinner way he seemed to be a little worried about her, and Keddy reflected that those who wrote soft words to Bobby did not fail of their reward.

It was one o'clock before he, not Wilton, spoke of Wytham. He was sleepy, and wished to tell his news and go to bed. Wilton turned on him quickly. Of course, of course; and what a beast he had been not to ask about it before! He lavished approbation on all that Keddy had done.

Then Keddy told about Colquhoun.

Wilton's manner changed in an instant. There had been nothing in the whole affair of Miss Oakes that Keddy more disliked than Wilton's lack of any real affection for the girl. The same thing had struck him to-night. But from the moment of Colquhoun's intrusion the scene became alive. Wilton paced the room, muttered, swore, and stormed. His heart was in it now. Keddy watched him with weary interest.

'We'll do it,' Wilton said excitedly. 'Let him try. He thinks he's nabbed me. Let him come and see.'

And thus he continued, with a stream of lusty abuse that he seemed to taste with pleasure as he spoke it. Keddy suggested the obvious changes of plans which prudence indicated. But they were brushed aside. The thing was interesting now.

'And you——'

Wilton stood still as it struck him that Colquhoun had seen Keddy, that Keddy was in the same boat, and might not find it so delightful.

'Oh—my—goodness—how beastly sorry I am!'

He stared open-mouthed, and most unreasonably the score against Colquhoun mounted higher. But it was

impossible not to be convinced when Keddy declared it did not matter. He did not care, he did not care a twopenny damn, what Porker might think or say or do. He hated Porker.

‘But, Bobby, the bother is that Arthur and Carpenter were there, too.’

‘What! with Porker?’

‘No; a real accident.’ And Keddy told shortly that part of the story, too.

So, since Wilton knew quite well what things hurt Keddy and what did not, the long day ended with a picture. Wilton was sorry, and his feelings, good or bad, were seldom denied an adequate expression. Whatever good things he had to offer—nothing, as Pollock said, but to fight till he dropped—they were all Keddy’s then. Words might not do much. But in peace as well as in war, when words fail, one’s hands may express one’s feelings. Wilton was an artist with his hands. He sat on the arm of Keddy’s chair and took him by the shoulders and said that he was sorry. ‘If only he would be like that to other people!’ thought Keddy as he went to bed.

Most of the next day he spent in Wilton’s room. He thought that perhaps Mr. Carpenter would come round to see him, and there was something so unsettled in the atmosphere that he intended not to meet that pressing friend till after Wednesday—until, in fact, he was on the point of going down for the long vacation. Therefore, his scout had the familiar order: ‘You can take my luncheon to Mr. Wilton’s room.’ Entrenched in that room he sat and read novels all day.

But his mood was discontented. He could enjoy nothing, and the day passed in discomfort. On the morning of Wednesday came Pollock with a bright idea, and sat on his bed as if nothing had happened or would happen. They would celebrate the last day of the term, said Pollock. They would go down the line to Keddy’s home, where Pollock had not been for ever so long. Wednesday was a half-holiday at the school. They would see Keddy’s people, and Pollock’s young brother in the school. They would get back in time for the

drunk which was coming off in Tremayne's room. Was it not a good idea? Would not Keddy agree?

But Keddy blinked and thought. It was no good.

'You see, I'm in this business here,' he said sadly. 'I'm in it now, whether I like it or not, and I've simply got to stay. Don't begin asking me what I'm going to do. I don't know a bit. But I'm worried about Porker. I should be wretched if I went away to-day.'

Wretched he was, indeed, already. To think back to Mrs. Wilton's letter did not help him. The glamour was off it. He was definitely unhappy.

Wilton's room was not available as a retreat that morning. Delville was there, and he and Wilton were talking about things that Keddy felt he was not meant to hear. He sat in his own room, and risked unwelcome visitors. Nothing, however, disturbed him but an urgent note from St. Saviour's House asking him to go round at once. This he ignored.

Then came luncheon, and Keddy's head was clearer as to what it actually was he feared. It was not that Colquhoun wished to capture Wilton, but that Wilton wished to hit back at Colquhoun. That was in the air, very plain to see. It was that which worried Keddy. As at a former crisis, it was not the collision that would do the damage. The trouble would come with the rebound.

At two o'clock he picked up a book and went across to a room in the front quad belonging to a man he knew. He said he had a headache, and was sick of his own room. His light petulance was not a thing to cause surprise, and the owner of the room went out for the afternoon, leaving him on the window-seat. The window-seat overlooked the quad. So did Keddy's eyes, and hour after hour struck from the clock in the tower opposite. But as often as he looked into the chaplain's window to the right, the great black figure at the writing-table was still there. The hunt had not begun.

But Keddy had his plan, and the day was tedious no more. He found a tin of biscuits, which kept up his spirits at teatime. The hands of the clock went round,



and still Colquhoun did not move out of his line of vision. It was five o'clock ; it was six o'clock, and then at last the watcher drew his head behind the curtain. Colquhoun's room was empty, and his heavy tread was crunching the gravel in the quad.

Some weeks before this time it had fallen to Keddy to learn that there are few amusements so good as being hunted. That was on the cool dry night when they had gone to Angel Square. It was daytime now, and sultry, with rain in the air, and the bloom of adventure was neither fresh nor free from rot. But he learned that there is joy also in hunting someone else. Elaborately innocent, he went out into the quad. He kept his distance. He strolled behind Colquhoun through the passage and into the other quad. Again he found his senses tingling enjoyably. His eyes were roving, now harmlessly across the cloudy sky, now to right and left with all the parade of carelessness. But always on the edge of his vision was the figure of Colquhoun. As he expected, he saw him go in towards Wilton's staircase by the hall. Instantly he himself turned into his own staircase, which was half-way down the quad. He ran up and got his hat. He looked out of the window, and Colquhoun was walking back towards the front quad. That was natural, for Wilton was at Wytham.

So Keddy waited, followed, kept a cautious distance, and saw Colquhoun take his bicycle from the railings in front of the porch. It was all exactly as Keddy had desired. His own bicycle stood ready among the others, and when it was safe he followed with it out into the road.

To Wytham there are more ways than one. But the choice must be made before going far out of Oxford. Colquhoun went by the road that passes the station. Therefore, Keddy turned into St. Giles's, and made for the upper river and the towpath. Heart doctors might have marshalled their patients on the road, and cried that this was a perfect specimen of all imprudence. It was pace, the last degree of pace that Keddy could achieve. But it was more than pace. It was anxiety and excite-

ment and resolve to catch something more important than a train. Did Porker think he would find evidence to bellow out before a College meeting? Would he face his browbeaten colleagues with the dire alternative—'either Wilton goes or I do'? He had been clever, but not if Keddy knew it should he succeed in connecting Wilton with Miss Oakes without calling for that telegram and confessing to the shame of reading it.

He sped along the towpath, a danger for others besides himself and Porker. He gained the road at Godstow, and waited not to subsidize those deformed gate-openers who stank in Pollock's nostrils. Sweating and breathless, he rounded into Wytham, and his reward outside the cottage was that he saw no cyclist yet upon the Oxford road.

He ran his bicycle into hiding round a corner, and entered the cottage without ceremony. Then the last that he asked of fortune was given him, for Mrs. Cobbs was out, and Wilton and Miss Oakes were in. He found them in the parlour. Miss Oakes sat at the table over the remains of tea. Bobby leaned against the fireplace with a cigarette. Keddy shook hands with the girl, and immediately asked Bobby to speak to him in the kitchen. Bobby raised his eyebrows.

'This is how he bullies me,' he said, smiling, to the girl. Then he went with Keddy.

The parlour-door was shut. They went into the back kitchen, for Keddy had no mind to be overheard.

'Porker will be here in about two minutes,' he panted.

'Oh, I've been wondering when we were to have that pleasure,' Wilton replied.

'And now,' said Keddy, devilishly diplomatic, 'do you want to give Porker the worst throw he's had in his life?'

There was nothing that Wilton would like better.

'Then hide. Leave me with Miss Oakes. Let Porker find us. It was me he saw here before. Let him find me now. He's nothing against you except that telegram, and he'll never have the face to use that. We shall dish him.'

The plan was so ingenious that Wilton paid it the com-

pliment of a moment's consideration. They knew that Colquhoun would scorn to proceed against Keddy. Wilton and Delville were to be his bag that day, and meaner game would have been sheer humiliation. Keddy incurred no risk. His plan was ingenious, and yet, as he sat on the flap of a clothes-mangle, he wondered what madness had ever made him think it possible. One look at Wilton now was enough to show him how utterly unsuitable was the part he had assigned him.

'It won't do,' said Wilton.

'But it would make Porker mad. We couldn't possibly give him a harder knock. And oh, Bobby'—the truth was blurted out at last—'oh, Bobby, damn it, it would stop this beastly shuttlecock and battledore business, people hitting you and you hitting people, and on and on till the Lord knows when!'

Would it? Wilton smiled.

'It won't do,' he said, not without some tenderness. 'I'm going back. You can get out through the yard. Go on.'

He went back to the parlour, and Keddy followed disheartened. He had an idea that his proposal had not been very creditable, and that Bobby knew it. Anyhow, he had failed. There was nothing now to do but to wait for the crash.

Not unnaturally the girl in the parlour greeted them with some alarm. She looked up at Wilton in a flutter of gentle apprehension. What was the matter? Why had he gone away? And Keddy was uncharitable enough to think her clever in making the most of a chance like this. Nothing could have better suited that pretty baby manner than a timid appeal to Bobby, who was strong.

'Did you ever see such lunacy?' said Wilton, with reassuring cheeriness. 'Look at Keddy, who's got a bad heart. He's come out here on a bicycle at sixty miles an hour.'

'Oh, Mr. Forth, you shouldn't!' said the girl. 'You really shouldn't!'

She looked at him reproachfully.

'What drink have we got?' Wilton asked. 'There's no brandy. There's fiz. We'll make him have some fiz.'

Keddy did not want it, but Wilton banged down a pint bottle on the table, and hunted round for the champagne-cutter.

'Sit down and rest, Mr. Forth,' said the girl, putting a cushion in the one armchair.

Keddy sat down and accepted the kindness offered.

'A friend of Bobby's must be looked after.'

Keddy did not like that little bit of gaiety.

'Oh, by the way,' Wilton remarked, 'one of the dons is just coming out here to take me home and give me a good whipping.'

'Oh, have you been naughty?' the girl asked lightly.

'It's serious,' said Wilton, as he found the champagne-cutter on a shelf. 'It's quite serious. That's why Keddy came out in such a hurry on his bike.'

Another splendid opportunity, thought Keddy then. Nor did the girl miss it. Back came the childlike appeal for protection, the pretty fright, eyes wide, mouth open, colour coming quickly. But what was strange, what Keddy marked with annoyance, was that this mood in which he liked her least well was the one that Bobby liked best. He saw it in his face. For Bobby flushed and was excited. He looked quickly across at the girl, smiled, chaffed, and was pleased.

'Oh, we'll be all right,' he said. 'Keddy 'll have the poker, and I'll have the tongs. Oh, you'll see something worth seeing.'

He held the bottle, and got to work with the cutters. The pop that ensued was a particularly fine one. It had, at that hour of the afternoon, a good dissipated sound. They could not have calculated a better accompaniment to the arrival of Colquhoun.

He burst in, huge, hot, and ruddy, in a state which he, in more genial moments, would have described as sweating like a pig. Keddy stood up. Miss Oakes sat down. Wilton held the frothing bottle over a plate on the table.

'Well, my young man, I think I've caught you this time.'

The exclamation was made with legitimate pride. Wilton looked up in surprise that was admirable. He glanced an apology at Miss Oakes. He began, as he continued, with perfect neatness.

‘Oh, do you want us, Mr. Colquhoun?’ he asked.

The chaplain did not remove his hat. He put his hands in his pockets, and gloried in the famous scene.

‘Yes, my young fellow; I’ve been “wanting” you for some time. I think you’ll find it best to leave here sharp, and go back to Oxford. Your game’s up.’

‘That would be very inconvenient,’ Wilton hesitated.

The good work was being done, while Keddy’s heart sank. This politeness was driving Colquhoun to lose his temper.

‘A bike ride’s not a bad thing on a summer afternoon,’ said he. ‘I thought I’d just ride out and see your jolly party for myself. I shall be able to explain it to the college now, and the college will enjoy hearing of it, no doubt.’

There is a technical meaning in which the ‘college’ stands for the authorities thereof.

‘I’m sure I’ve no objection to the college hearing about anything,’ Wilton replied.

Colquhoun paused and looked at the faces before him.

‘You, too,’ he said to Keddy. ‘You silly young fool!’

‘Mr. Colquhoun,’ said Wilton, ‘I really don’t understand. You seem to suggest that Forth and I are doing something wrong——?’

‘Wrong? Oh, nonsense! Only something which is not fashionable at our college. My dear fellow, don’t imagine I don’t know all about that woman there. I’ve made my inquiries. I know what she is. You come out here with a woman of low character——’

‘Oh, Bobby! where is my father?’ the girl cried.

‘You take your name off hall; you bring your watch-dog with you——’

It was quite time for the clap of thunder now. Gertrude Oakes had risen, with every suggestion of tears. Keddy, itching with distress, was battling with an impulse to go to Wilton’s head and treat him as one treats a nervous

horse. And on Wilton, on the surface of him, the familiar signs came out : the deepening of his colour, the clearing of his eyes, the setting of his nerves. But what of the parts within, where anger burns and actions are determined ? Well, he was a man playing more games than one. There was the foe to be struck, there was the girl also. The stakes were big, or seemed so at that hot moment. The player had never been a man who counted up the cost of what he chose to do.

Keddy feared violence, but it was not to be quite that.

‘ Really, Mr. Colquhoun,’ said Wilton very coolly, ‘ you are making a mistake. This lady is Miss Oakes, to whom I am engaged to be married.’

It would be hard to say to which person in the room the announcement gave the greatest surprise, unless it were to Wilton himself. Keddy did then feel something in his heart which he had not felt while pounding along on his bicycle. The girl brought out a handkerchief, and sat down on the chair by Wilton.

‘ If you wish to see Miss Oakes’s father,’ said he, ‘ you will find him with Delville on the road to Godstow.’

That might be thought an imprudence, but Colquhoun was not in a state to take advantage of it. His sword had been knocked from his hand. By a trick, it might be, and by a piece of foul play that the judges would afterwards condemn, but for the present he stood stupid and defenceless.

‘ Really, Gertrude, I must apologize for Mr. Colquhoun,’ said Wilton to the girl. ‘ I am sure no one will regret this more than he, when he thinks it over.’

So the advantage was followed up, and if Colquhoun pulled himself together, it was only to make decent his retreat. Threats, violence, breezy assurance, had failed him ; only sarcasm was left.

‘ I congratulate you,’ he said, with laboured irony ; and he turned his back, departed, and slammed both doors behind him.

Tears are unquestionable facts, whatever the emotion that brings them. Clever, clever, thought Keddy, forgetful that the shock which made his judgment harsh

might have made the girl's emotions real. Glistening and trembling, she looked up at Wilton, raised one small and trustful hand to his.

'Bobby—you do ? you do ?' she whispered.

He bent and kissed her.

'Why, of course I do—if you—— Of course, I always meant it from the first moment I saw you.'

She cried softly, clinging to him. It did not seem to Keddy that his presence made much difference. He went out quietly into the kitchen. There would be no hurry about the ride back to Oxford. He could take his time, and time, a long time, he felt that he would need to measure the full extent of his utter and hopeless wretchedness.

But in the kitchen he was caught by Wilton, who came after him. Wilton was hot and excited. He gripped his arm in a way that hurt.

'I want you to go out towards Godstow,' he said. 'You'll meet Delville and old Oakes on the road. Tell Delville to keep him out till eight. Supper's at eight. That beast has upset the girl. She's not fit to have people back here yet.'

'All right,' said Keddy nervelessly.

He went out to the road. Really, it did not much matter whether it was to Oxford or Godstow that he went, with a message or without one, alive or dead.

He dug his hands into his pockets, set out along the road, and the look of him would have given Mr. Carpenter a vivid inspiration for sermons on the outcome of imprudence. On the imprudence of breathing Wilton's air all parties had been agreed, though fine affection prompted it, though good might come of it. If good had actually resulted, then there would have been a question left to argue. But if the outcome be unmitigated evil, if it is hideous and exasperating and painful and low, then there is little defence to make against Mr. Carpenter.

'If only he had told me !' thought Keddy.

At one moment he discounted Bobby's words as a handful of bluff flung hard in the face of Colquhoun. Then miserable memories came up to baffle consolation.

He had seen Bobby look so strangely at the girl, with a glint in his eyes that had never shown before. And Keddy felt the thud of the nails in his coffin.

'And there was to have been Somerset,' he thought, with a new pang.

From time to time came the vision of a dismal breakfast-table with Bobby at one end and that woman at the other. Keddy was not twenty. The gloom of the prospect was impenetrable. The evening, moreover, was dull and heavy, and the valley of the Thames knows how to be depressing. Keddy went through the village, and turned to the right to Godstow. The straight, low-lying road stretched out before him, the road by which they have built a path of planks for the times when the floods are out. He sat on a gate and waited for Delville.

Only last Saturday had Bobby promised him that Gertrude Oakes was going to vanish from their world for ever. Could it be that he had lied wilfully? Could he have changed his mind? No; if Bobby had not prudence, he had pride at least, and Keddy drove that breakfast-table out of his mind. He did not need to look into the future for sensations to keep him busy. The present held enough. Bobby, the Bobby of Saturday and Somerset, the Bobby of great rides and long evenings, who looked clean and smelt nice, was there in the cottage drying up that woman's tears. It tasted like rotten eggs, it stank like drains, it felt like slime and vermin, and all the suns and breezes of July would not avail to clean the filth away. It was one thing to hear that Miss Oakes was coming to Wytham by arrangement; it was quite different to see the arrangement carried out.

Presently Delville came along from Godstow with an elderly bearded man in baggy trousers and a check waistcoat. Keddy sat still and jerked his head to bring Delville to his side.

'Bobby says you're to keep him out till eight,' he said, without explanation. But then Delville did not seem to want any explanation. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter past seven.



'I can't,' he said; 'I've got to be back. I'd no idea it was so late. You must do the job yourself.'

Keddy got off the gate, and Delville went back to the man in baggy trousers.

'Wilton and Miss Oakes have gone down to the river another way,' he said. 'They want you to meet them at the lock. I'm afraid I haven't time to go with you, but may I introduce Mr. Forth.'

So Keddy found himself tied to a person much less presentable than the soft-eyed charmer in white serge. The father, indeed, should have proved a wholesome corrective to the daughter, had Keddy needed that. His eyes were fishy, his voice thick, his manner distressingly insinuating. Yoked with this companion, Keddy was committed also to a clumsy lie, for, of course, they had to tramp to Godstow Lock, be surprised at not finding Wilton, wait a reasonable time, and then walk back to Wytham. For three-quarters of an hour it lasted. It did not add much to the small residuum of Keddy's interest in life.

Tired and hungry, at eight o'clock, he arrived with the old man in the cottage parlour. Supper was ready. Wilton insisted that Keddy should stay and feed with them, Delville having taken his bicycle. Miss Oakes, of course, was eager to second the invitation. So Keddy was thrust unwillingly into the position of invalid, and had not the least idea how well he looked the part. The strain of the day had told upon him. The little he remembered of the meal was that he ate and drank a great deal, that Miss Oakes relieved her timidity with little daring flights of gaiety, and that not the smallest allusion was made to matrimonial projects. For his own behaviour he had no thought or care. He laughed at demand, smiled to order, and replied with regularity to the person who might speak. And the grandfather clock had crawled some way on its journey down from nine before a new phase came over the scene.

'To the great future, Mr. Wilton,' said Miss Oakes's father, raising a glass of Madeira.

'To the great future,' said Wilton in reply. But before

he drank, his eyes had found Keddy's across the table, and he said, for Keddy's private hearing : ' To July !'

Immediately with those words Keddy got back his sense of proportion. All at once he was aware of warm blood in his veins. There were lights on the table ; there was the world outside. Almost with pity he looked at the laughing girl and her shabby father, whose suns were setting while his rose. Not theirs, but his, was Bobby, who drank to July in the very presence of the siren. Keddy in unreasoning wholesale loathing had blamed him for not liking her enough, and then for liking her too much. But there was no question of liking now. It was the end, the breaking of the curse, the final separation. He saw it in Bobby's eyes ; it flashed at him while Bobby drank that toast. ' To July !' Keddy drank in return, and he drained a glass more full than Bobby's. Be it sin that was here in the wood and plaster parlour, sin as in Mr. Carpenter's language, bad taste as in Arthur's, rotten eggs as in Keddy's own, it was past and ended now. And for the very disgust he had felt, for his hatred, scorn, repulsion, now that it was over, he rejoiced.

With all the decent show of anxiety that a man makes over the time, Wilton looked at his watch and frowned. It was early, yet he was actually thinking of going. Keddy could hardly sit still in his chair.

He had some work to do, said Wilton, in answer to remonstrance, and Keddy's heart warmed at the silly lie. They must go round to the inn for the trap.

' Oh, Mr. Forth will fetch the trap,' said the girl. But Wilton raised the finger of scorn.

' Trust him with a horse ! Not for five seconds,' he laughed.

To-morrow—he would come early to-morrow ? they asked. What time ? How soon ?

' Why, as early as I can. What do you think I'm made of ?'

But Keddy recognized another lie.

Once more he had to shake their hands. Once more he had to see the sight that made his gorge rise—the kiss that could not be refused. But though this time, too,

there was excitement in Bobby's face, it was not the excitement of the kiss. It was the excitement of the end. Keddy lit a pipe, which he needed badly. Besides, there was a cleanness in tobacco. It took away the last of that sickening taste. So Keddy thought.

The cottage door was shut upon them both, and it was raining. But Keddy had hardly perceived the fact before his neck was nearly dislocated by a blow on his back as violent as the greatness of even this occasion called for.

'With flying colours, Keddy! Done, done, done! *Finis coronat opus*. We'll tell that to the bunnies in Somerset.'

'Bobby, you *are* an ass; you've knocked my pipe out.'

'It's the end, my boy; the end! What! Your pipe? Oh, I'm a beast. I'll find it.'

And he did, for he was in the mood in which a man sees in the dark.

They walked to the inn, and Keddy's own satisfaction he had hardly got the chance of expressing. For Bobby was quicker with his words, and he kept a firm grip on the scruff of Keddy's neck.

'Buck up, man—buck up! Soon we sail—with the gale——'

'Whew!' Keddy whistled out a long breath of satisfaction; 'it's like opening somebody's window! It's like getting away from the dentist's!'

Then again Bobby lit the night with blazing exultation.

'That rot about an engagement—you pretty well did for Porker with that,' Keddy observed presently.

'Such an opportunity will not occur again,' Wilton quoted.

'I liked it when Porker went out,' Keddy continued. 'It was the only bit I liked at all. I always like you when you look as if Moab was your washpot.'

Wilton laughed in considerable pleasure.

'But the Oakes woman, Bobby. Why did you tell her you meant it?'

Then Wilton laughed quite uproariously.

'Look here, I insist on your getting a new name for

that girl. You can call her the departed Oakes, the defunct Oakes. You can call her Mrs. R. Wilton if you like. That's what *she'd* like. I say, it's raining.'

He stopped, and turned up Keddy's collar, not without such violence as was necessary.

'You mustn't catch cold. You're dog tired. That's when one gets cold. That does more to give you a cold than all the damned draughts and soakings you ever had.'

This was all very kind, but it did not answer Keddy's question.

The people at the inn brought out the trap, and stared at Wilton's tips. Even the horse was impatient to be out of Wytham. Keddy jumped up beside Bobby, who tucked the rug round him with all the imperious kindness that then prevailed.

Keddy sighed a long sigh of comfort. They were off, and Wytham was a place of the past.

'Oh, this is ripping!'

Even the rain was a friend, for it was cool and clean, and part of the old world Keddy knew and liked. So was the motion of the trap, and so was Bobby's hard driving. Surely now was Wytham a thing of the past!

'Do you know this is my twenty-first birthday?'

The remark came out like others, keen and light with boyish spirits.

'What?' said Keddy, turning his head in astonishment.

Wilton laughed boisterously. Why shouldn't he be twenty-one? Keddy would be twenty-one some day, and the whole college would get drunk.

'But, Bobby, why the devil didn't you tell me? Think of my never knowing! I'm so awfully sorry!'

As Wilton explained, the state of opinion in the college would have made any attempt at festivity absurd. But there was to be a day in July at home. Keddy would be there to help.

So Keddy would be there to help! The night was dark all round, the rain beat against them, and was cold. Keddy huddled himself together, and dark and rain and cold were nothing but shapes in which the thought of

July assailed him. Certainly Bobby should drive him about by night in July. It would be wet like this, with the chilliness of night, and they would come back to a fire in that great stone house whose picture Keddy liked. As to the birthday celebrations, they would be jolly enough. Keddy was nearer Somerset here than Wytham, let geography say what it might. Nothing could keep him from Somerset now. Nothing, unless Bobby were to pitch them out of the trap with this wild driving. Cheerfully at each gate he jumped down to open it, to remove an obstacle that stood between Wytham and July. Then the gates banged behind them. They rattled along in the dark till there came an obstacle unforeseen by Keddy.

'Pon my word, it hasn't been such a bad birthday after all. Contemplate it, Keddy! The stricken field of foes! Two duels, with you for my second! Victory in each! Porker and Gertrude! Yes, by God, and the whole gang in college dished too!'

He whipped up the horse, and the trap bounded forward.

'Why do you say you've dished the college?' Keddy asked.

'Oh, my conscience, don't you see? Didn't they drive me out into the wilderness, the swine, and think I would sit and mope like a cur in disgrace? Do you know what I said when they turned me out? I said, "Never say die!" Let 'em go and ask Gertrude if I died. She'll tell them. My God, she will!'

Once more the trap jerked forward.

'I've a passion for completeness, Keddy. Those fellows turned me into the wilderness, and I took the weapons of the wilderness. Great Scott, I haven't laid them down till I knew how to use them with success. Let the college take that!'

He paused. There were no more gates to open now. They were on the Oxford road.

'And why do you say you had a duel with Miss Oakes?' Keddy asked. It was a pity that Bobby would talk like this. It spoilt the drive.

'Oh, she's contemptible. She thought she was going to gobble me up, and come down and run the show in Somerset. That girl, with that father! She's been at it for months. Didn't you see her face when I told Colquhoun I was going to marry her? Bah! She thought she was going to win the game without even paying her stake.'

'She thought that, did she,' said Keddy.

The rain was heavy now. But there was worse than rain. Faintly, distinctly, sickeningly, the smell of rotten eggs came back to Keddy's nostrils.

'But she paid her stake to-night,' said Wilton almost to himself. 'And she lost the game too.'

Through the darkness Keddy's eyes were set on the horse's ears. So they had been for some moments. There are times when it is comforting to have something to grip with one's eyes.

'Last Saturday,' he said slowly, 'you told me you were only going in for this Wytham business because it had been arranged long ago. I suppose it had all been arranged, everything right down to the end.'

'For the sake of completeness, Keddy. I don't stop half way in a fight.'

Whether it was the college or Colquhoun or the wretched girl he was fighting Keddy cared little.

'You didn't make that very clear when you told me about the arrangement,' he said. 'And when you told the Oakes woman you meant to marry her—— I suppose that was for the sake of completeness too?'

'Yes, it was.'

'And she still thinks you mean it?'

'She'll soon learn.'

The horse's ears were very useful to Keddy. It made his eyes sore to look at them so hard. But sometimes one's stomach revolts so violently that counter irritation is a blessing.

'Nothing would end properly without a kicking from you, Keddy,' said Wilton with perfect good humour.

'Oh, I see.'

For the coils of disgust held Keddy in a grip that made it hard to answer pleasantly. Something had gone wrong

with his inside, and there was a straining about his throat. He was glad that Bobby did not choose this moment for turning up his collar, or doing any things like that.

'You certainly can be damned offensive when you like,' said Wilton.

'Can I?'

Thus Keddy answered, wearily and sulkily. There was nothing else to say, or, indeed, to do or think or hope. A single vehement instinct he felt, to recoil in all his senses from a world that had gone foul. The air of the night was foetid in his nostrils. The very shirt on his body was a thing from which he shrank.

'Oh, I suppose you're feeling sick and all that,' said Wilton crisply.

Keddy had no answer this time. Let Bobby be angry! He did not care for that. He cared for nothing. He had not spirit to care even that the charms of Somerset were blasted. So they reached the Randolph, where the trap was left, and walked to their own college. But nothing more was said between them.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DELUGE

ON that Wednesday evening Mr. Carpenter did little for the brightness of the dinner table at St. Saviour's House. He was silent. Though the talk turned largely on the importation of frozen mutton from New Zealand, a subject of which he had a particular and detailed knowledge, he took no part in it, but let them bandy inaccuracies without even the gentlest correction. He had no guest that night, yet he withdrew to his room the moment that the Warden had said grace.

Indeed, he had troubles heavy enough for even so buoyant a nature as his. Having summoned Keddy by letter the day before, he had seen neither Keddy nor a word of explanation. No notice had been taken of his invitation to the dinner just finished. And this was Wednesday night, with Keddy going down to-morrow. Twice this day had he been to Keddy's room. The invasion of colleges was a practice he avoided, but if ever an occasion had called for strong measures it was this.

Yes, his sleep had been troubled last night, and worry all day long had knotted his brow. But the consolation of activity was not denied him. From dinner he returned to his room, and rang the bell. He sat down at his desk, on which the wares of Messrs. Hills and Saunders left just sufficient room for a writing-case, an inkpot, and a human arm. He wrote to Pollock. He wrote with that urgent brevity of which he was so great a master. He begged that Pollock would come to him immediately. A maidservant came in answer to the bell. 'Let the mes-



senger take this note at once,' he said. 'But wait!' For this was not one of those clergymen whose arrangements all miscarry, and whose investments all go wrong. An identical note he wrote to Tatham, and it would be ill luck indeed if neither one nor other brought him the news he wanted. 'Let the messenger take these *two* notes.'

It was eight o'clock. Mr. Carpenter lit a cigarette, and paced the room impatiently. All framed around him were the pictures of past triumphs, at times a joy and solace; but when there was a present Mr. Carpenter cared very little for past or future. He folded his hands behind his fine girth; he bowed his head and tossed it; he sucked his lips, and gathered hills and valleys on his brow; he wiped the sweat from his forehead, and it comforted him not at all to know that there were photographs of ninety and nine just persons around him.

Again and again he looked at his watch. The messenger will have reached the college, he thought. The notes will have been delivered. They should be on their way. He quickened his pace. 'They should be here,' he said aloud.

'Mr. Pollock,' said the maidservant.

'What has happened, Mr. Carpenter?' said he.

'Sit down, Pollock, sit down. What has happened? Nothing has happened, nothing, nothing. That is why I sent for you. Where is Malcolm?'

Now Pollock's nerves, volcanic in their activity, were volcanic in their exhaustion. In the matter of Keddy and Wilton he had, since Monday night, been quite incapable of any emotion whatever. He made one spiritless attempt to get Keddy out of Oxford, and then he sank into apathy. This is just the difference between a man of nerves and a man of fuss. He had come to St. Saviour's House because he thought the summons meant something important. It did not. But Pollock had no resentment. He crossed his legs, and with dull precision he explained that he knew nothing of Keddy's movements. He had spoken to him on Monday night, he added. It was useless. Nothing could be done with him. He would stick to Wilton, though he hated it.

'I sent for him,' said Mr. Carpenter. 'He has not come. I looked for him in his room. He has been out each time. I expected him to dinner to-night. He was not here. And, Pollock, he goes down to-morrow.'

'I suppose you want to see him before he goes,' said Pollock.

'Want! I must—I must! Oh, if only you realized he importance!'

'As the mischief is already done,' said Pollock wearily, 'it seems a little late for your purposes.'

But it was never too late for Mr. Carpenter.

'Pollock, I must see Malcolm.'

'Very well. You had better go to Wilton's room. You will find him there. He has been there all the last two days.'

Pollock lay back in his chair. He had made one protest. And now the matter was where he wished it to be—out of his hands. Mr. Carpenter looked at his watch.

'Mr. Tatham,' said the maidservant.

But already the order had gone down—full steam ahead—and had it been Tatham's floating body that Mr. Carpenter saw in the waves ahead he would have ploughed through it. His hat was in his hand. 'We will go at once,' he had said to Pollock. And to Tatham, to the superfluous, irrelevant Tatham, he gave just what he could afford as he swept him down the long bare passage of St. Saviour's House.

'Ah, Herbert dear, how good of you to come so quickly! So good of you, dear old boy,' he said, squeezing his elbow, and slightly forcing the pace. 'But I wanted to ask you something, some information I wanted, and now here's Pollock who has told me. That's it, dear old boy. Pollock has told me. And I think we'd better not talk about it, you know. I think that would be best. I think it would be wisest, Herbert. But thank you for coming; it was like you; thank you so much.'

So they walked to the college, the astonished Tatham and the apathetic Pollock on either side of Mr. Carpenter's coat-tails. It was a grim walk. Even Tatham in his ignorance could see enough to be sure that Mr. Carpenter was going somewhere where he would take Satan by the

throat. There was little said. The rain began. But Mr. Carpenter looked neither to the right nor to the left. Tatham, as needs he must, turned off in the college porch, and went to his own room.

It was a strange thing that the outlaw's room should become the scene of Mr. Carpenter's operations. But little he cared for that. He would not, like Pollock, feel the force of his surroundings. Walls were walls to Mr. Carpenter, and though Keddy on the sofa had looked as cool as Galahad that would not have come between the dragon and his wrath.

‘Provoking ! provoking !’

They stood in the empty room, and Pollock expressed regret.

‘Provoking !’ said Mr. Carpenter. ‘And we have let Tatham go. Dear me, dear me, Pollock, this is too annoying. What other room can he be in ? His own room was dark ! The porter has not seen him ! My goodness, this is serious !’

‘Surely it is becoming pretty plain where he is,’ said Pollock.

‘Pollock ! Hush ! Now I am afraid I am giving you a great deal of trouble. But I must really ask you to go and question Tatham. He is often well informed.’

‘Oh, is it any use ?’

‘Either you, Pollock, or I,’ said Mr. Carpenter shortly.

Pollock much preferred that errands in the college should be run by himself. So Mr. Carpenter was left in suspense. It was half-past eight, and he had a long wait before him. But it was not to be in Wilton's room. Pollock came back unsuccessful, and Mr. Carpenter went off alone to wait in Keddy's room.

If one walks, say a dozen times a minute, across a room that gives a five-yards' stretch, the result of an hour and a half so employed is a journey three miles long. Mr. Carpenter would not have been so stout a man had Keddy gone to Wytham every evening. There were books to read, there were pictures and photographs to examine, but would such things as these have soothed the sorrows of this turbulent priest ? One photograph alone he

stopped to notice. He took it from the mantelpiece—the portrait of a clean-faced boy half through a public school career. He held it, drew in his lips, and tossed his head impatiently. Handsome? Yes. Foolish? Yes. Wicked? No! Oh, the folly of those who dealt with youth! So they had driven Wilton to this, and Malcolm Forth went with him. What a pair! That hot generous nature, no more the devil's making than was Pollock's own! That poor boy, poor foolish boy, sent out to sin, sin, sin! And Malcolm too! Oh, it were better that a millstone were hanged round certain persons' necks. And yet, and yet, in them also it was folly. Folly, heedless, ignorant, untrained, unreflecting! The thoughtless crowd began it, the wilful boy accepted it, the imprudent friend assisted! All of this while Mr. Carpenter sat impotent at home unable to lift a finger in the confusion that might so easily be righted! Oh, folly is the rain that brings the devil's harvest. Truly to Mr. Carpenter the world seemed a madhouse.

Again he walked. From outside, where the shower continued, he heard scarcely a sound. The college seemed asleep. Now and then there escaped him a sharp ejaculation as his disjointed thought knocked up against the more lamentable corners of life. Oh, for a little common-sense in the world! Such a little! A little kindness for the sinner, a little study of the sin, and how many disasters we might avert! The pity of it! The pity of it! And hardest of all, the thought that now, when he came at last, too late to save, too soon to comfort, the friend's voice must speak nothing but the solemn message of the priest!

But he could not think connectedly. The room was a prison, and he chafed at his inactivity. Any moment might bring Malcolm, yet he had not considered a word he would say to him. He knew by experience that his speech would be given him by a higher power than his own premeditation. But the time was wearing on. The shower was at its height.

A tantalizing disappointment was sent him. He heard someone running through the rain. The steps came up

the staircase. One last mute prayer he hurled up heavenwards. The boy'll be wet, he thought; I shall have to make him change before I talk. Oh, prayer, prayer—and it was Pollock. Still, after the thing itself, the next best hope was for news.

'Well—well?'

'Well, this is something like a shower, isn't it. So Keddy hasn't come?'

'You know nothing of him?'

'No.'

With ill-concealed impatience Mr. Carpenter resumed his walk. Pollock sat down in a chair.

'If you will trust it to me, Mr. Carpenter, I promise you he shall come to see you to-morrow morning. I can make him do that, I know.'

But something had told Mr. Carpenter that the time for seeing Keddy was to-night. It was useless to expect Pollock to understand that. The tone of the clergyman's refusal implied as much.

'It is nearly ten,' said Pollock.

Mr. Carpenter made no reply.

So Pollock lay back in his chair and watched. Minutes went past in silence, minutes in which the shower ceased with the suddenness of summer. The incongruity of it, thought Pollock. For he knew that the end of the shower would set this little tragedy in the midst of an enveloping comedy, till Mr. Carpenter would resemble one of those tiny typhoons which whirl the dead leaves round and round amid the stillness of an autumn day. A minute more, and his expectation was fulfilled. Resounding from the stone ceiling of the tunnel that joins the quads, echoing against the buildings, changing the whole rhythm of the night, the first shrill cry of revellers at large came up to the operating room, where table, knife and surgeon awaited the sick soul of Keddy. It rang out, 'Iye-i-,' and the clatter of feet on stone came with it. 'Iye-i-,' 'Porker Colquhou-oun! Says his prayers to a baboo-oon!' And a deep-voiced songster went off the length of the quad bawling out with tireless solemnity and reiterated emphasis. '*What shall we do*

with the drunken sailor ? *Put him in the boathouse until he is sober. What shall we do——*

'You see, a lot of men are going down to-morrow,' Pollock explained. 'I'm afraid a good many are never coming back again. It's a farewell occasion. It'll go on for some time.'

'I see, I see,' Mr. Carpenter answered, and thereafter in his own dire stress he seemed not to notice the other world outside.

Nearer and nearer down the path came wild shrieks of terror, and the whoops of the pursuers. Who were they after ? Whose raiment was in peril ? Pollock listened enthralled. Yes, he knew the voice, and surely that delicious terror was a pleasure one thought one had lost with one's sailor suits. 'Oh, mercy ! mercy !' the victim screamed. Apparently he had found it, for there followed one of those ominous pregnant silences that the god of mischief loves.

Then the man of nerves and rigid tastes and stern proprieties could withstand the charm no longer. Oh, shrewd Mr. Carpenter, Pollock cried within himself. Oh, resourceful, indefatigable Mr. Carpenter, now has your small importance been engulfed, for it is not you, it is that noise outside that stands in Oxford for virtue, truth, and beauty. 'I must go,' he said, springing from his chair. The door behind him almost banged. He ran downstairs. He made for the silent group down the path. Shouting, chasing, violence, were gifts that heaven had not given to Pollock, but to join with happier brethren, to appreciate, to laugh rebukes and solemnly incite, to like and be liked, all these came easily. He had an elder brother's heart. Boyhood he loved the better because he had never been a boy. And only one regret slipped in—that Keddy was not here !

'He deserves it, the dirty devil !'

The words were Tremayne's, and Pollock quickened his steps.

'Too late ? I dare say it is ! I said it ought to have been done the last night of eights—I said so—and never a hint was given him that he was a swine. Never a word !

He's been strutting about ever since as if he'd got a free pass to do what he damn well likes. If you men won't come I'll go and wreck his room myself.'

Pollock thrust himself into the middle of the group.

'Oh, dear me, whoever has been making George so angry?' he laughed.

'Oh, he wants to wreck Wilton's room again.'

'So—do—we—all,' said a tired man sadly.

'The eternal and immutable principles of justice,' said the level voice of one who leant his weight on Pollock's shoulder.

But Pollock laughed his rare laugh.

'Georgy, you're a perfect baby. Come and sing songs in my room—I've set my whole heart on hearing your dear voice once more, and you can go and take Bobby's entrails afterwards.'

He tried to lead him off to the other quad.

'The man has never apologized for smashing the boat!' said Tremayne doggedly.

'I'll tell you what you shall do,' Curly Edwards broke in. 'You shall put up a notice in the porch. 'Messrs. Tremayne and company beg to state that they have refrained from wrecking Mr. Wilton's room a second time.'

'That's your game, Georgy,' said Pollock approvingly.

Suddenly someone started off towards the front quad, and the porch, raising the enthusiastic cry, 'Georgy Por-gy! Face like an orgy!' It was decisive. The whole lot of men, ten or twelve of them, ran after him, and the notice in the porch was now the whim of the moment. Pollock lent a little gold pencil. A notice about the loss of some don's three volumes of something was turned the other way round and written on. 'That'll just please Bobby,' said the happy writer.

Now was it not like Bobby, was it not in keeping with that habitual publicity that seemed always to blaze round the moments of his pride and shame, that he, being out of college, should choose this moment to come in? Had he come a little earlier or later, when Tremayne was sober enough to despise him or too sleepy to notice him, had he come without the wanton added dramatic touch

of Keddy at his side, had he arrived, above all, when the position was less nakedly suggestive of a fight—well, it would not have been Bobby. As was to be expected, he made a picture instantly. Indeed, they were all making pictures—Tremayne in the midst swelling with pugnacity, Curly with his good nature running out like water, Pollock's peace party turning quickly into one of war at any price, and Pollock himself on the brink of an apoplectic fit.

How near they were to war it would be hard to say exactly. Neither party could have gauged it very easily. Perhaps the best opinion would have come from the anxious porter watching by the door. He opened it in answer to Bobby's kick. Almost before he saw the group inside, the sound of his own name spoken scornfully must have come to Bobby's ears. He turned to the porter.

'Are there any notes for me?'

'No, sir, nothing for you, sir.'

'Oh, good-night.'

'Good-night, sir.'

But Keddy, who followed, had no civility to spare for the porter.

Then for the group that glowered at the other end of the brightly-lighted porch. For a proud and high-strung man of notoriety there could hardly be a less pleasant prospect than, say, to be firmly and carefully deprived of clothing, and conveyed in no stately posture about his college quad with every circumstance of publicity. Some such result, he knew, would follow the least collision at a time like this. But whatever else had deserted Bobby, his neatness had not. Nothing in his life became him like defending it. He put his hands in his pockets, and walked towards the group without haste and without provocation. He looked from face to face among them as though searching for a man he wished to find. His one chance lay in a perfect balance between bravado and flinching, which he knew, and which he achieved. Would he get through the group?

Would he? Keddy walked beside him. The curse had come on Keddy now. Here at last, he thought, was the time when he must take sides among friends in a



situation where any outcome would be torture. He watched the group from beneath sulky lashes, and ex-  
piated then and there all the sins that Mr. Carpenter might charge against him.

Nevertheless they went through unmolested. It may have been due to Keddy's presence. It may have been because Bobby played his part so neatly. For, as Curly commented, you can't go for a man when he looks like that. Even Pollock may have contributed to the cause of peace. 'Heaven preserve us !' he had gasped when first he saw the crisis. 'George, look here, George, you simply can't, not now, not yet ; oh, George, for God's sake don't be a fool !' Though no one listened to these breathless whispers, it remained that the only words spoken were words of peace, and the only violence was done by Pollock's fingers as they gripped Tremayne's arm.

'All right, Bobby, we'll pay you a little visit soon,' Tremayne called after him.

Wilton, on the path, turned round. He stood waiting for a moment. But no one moved, and Keddy pulled him round again. There was a respite.

Now of course if anything could have brought back Keddy's comfort of body and mind, if anything could have cleaned off the layers of Wytham filth that clung and stank upon his flesh, it was to take his proper place among those men in the porch. But here he was with Wilton.

There was a light in his room.

'You'd better come up to my room,' he said dismally. Those were the first words spoken between them since the topic of Miss Oakes had struck them silent on the road from Wytham.

'What ? Oh no, really. You'd better go to your room yourself ; I'll go to mine.'

Keddy's heart sank lower. He knew the meaning of that crisp civility of tone.

'Oh, Bobby, don't begin to be a fool,' he said.

They passed his staircase, but he did not turn in.

'Oh, you're coming to see me ragged, are you ?' Wilton asked briskly.

Keddy was wisely silent. His feelings were much more

bitter than he knew how to express. Six, seven, eight months, was it—or was it half a lifetime since the November night when he had seen a cat thrown in at Porker's window, and had come along this very path to enliven the undressing of a sleepy man who was yet the most exciting creature he had known? That night had always seemed the beginning of Oxford. And this one, surely, thought Keddy, would be the end. Even though he escaped the fearful tragedy that might happen if those fellows came to Bobby's room, what had he to show for his first year at Oxford? That he could not face Carpenter, that he had spoilt the taste of Pollock's friendship, that Curly thought him a fool, that Tremayne scowled at him, that he had lost all his friends except the one who made life hideous, and that even this one was now studying to hurt him! Men take unhappiness in different ways. They darken the sun with lamentations, they grasp new pleasures with a shaking hand, they sweat great drops of remedial activity, or they creep into a corner and curl themselves up to die. This last was Keddy's method.

Wilton stood on his hearthrug.

'Well, as you are here,' he said, 'you may as well tell me what you mean to do when your friends come to stash my room.'

'Oh, damn it, I don't know!'

In the corner of the room there was a low seat covered with a flat cushion and a rug. There Keddy threw himself, and was glad that his clothes were wet and cold in harmony with the prevailing wretchedness of things; he was sulky beyond all precedent. But Wilton looked like a man under perfect control, whose words are weighed and his intentions fixed.

'I may as well tell you that the first fellow who comes in here will get that coal-scuttle full in his face,' he said. 'That will hurt him, and probably make you feel sick. You'd really better go. At all costs we must avoid making you feel sick.'

Keddy said nothing, but that was because it came naturally to him to take pain in sulky silence. He lay looking at the ceiling. Wilton stood waiting, all alert,

with his hands behind his back. He had not time to plan another cut at Keddy before a step in the passage gave him something else to think about.

Keddy jumped up in his seat.

'Bobby, I tell you you're not to throw anything. Leave them to me. I know I can manage them.'

That Keddy should offer to manage what then came into the room was odd. For it heralded, not a fight for Bobby, but for him. It was Tatham.

'Oh, so you've come to see the fun too,' said Wilton.

Tatham took no notice of him.

'I have come to tell you,' he said to Keddy, 'that Carpenter is waiting for you in your room.'

'Oh, how very convenient,' said Wilton briskly, and paused to light a cigarette.

'The fact is, Tatham, things have been happening which have rather crushed Keddy. Look at him now; you can see he's rather downcast, can't you. It's quite time Carpenter was called in.'

There was no doubt about Keddy's being crushed, as Tatham saw.

'You see, it's altogether very unfortunate,' Wilton continued genially, 'and I really must explain in case people should get the idea that Keddy's a bad lot. He isn't, of course. Nothing of the sort! He has been about with me a good deal, I know, but I assure you, Tatham, it hasn't been because he wanted to share in my vices. Really, in sober truth, he hadn't any idea of doing that. He simply wanted to see the life I lead, and get a new stock of emotional experiences. Keddy's perfectly harmless, you know, but he does like seeing exciting things. That's why he stays here now when they are just coming to wreck this room. He means no harm; he only wants sensations. You see, his life has been rather more quiet than yours or mine. Naturally he liked the excitement of going about with a bold bad man.'

Tatham was dimly aware that his bark was on deep waters. 'I don't want to interrupt you——' he began cautiously. But Vitality, without rudeness, cut him short.

'My dear Tatham, I simply must explain, for Keddy's

sake. It has gone on for two terms now, sensation after sensation, and Keddy has really been quite grateful for it all. But to-night it suddenly became dangerous—you know how accidents *will* happen—and Keddy hadn't bargained for it a bit. What he meant to do was to clear out just before it got dangerous, as he cleared out of the climbing. But this time he stayed too late, and you've only got to look at him now to see the state it's brought him to. I'm awfully sorry. I only tell you because I know what a good fellow you are, and I thought you might help to explain it to Carpenter and Porker. You really might tell them, if you don't mind, Keddy did mean to clear out of my affairs before they got dangerous, before he was likely to get into trouble. It has simply been an accident that he didn't. He couldn't help it. Do you understand ?

Sober, practical, efficient Tatham kept a guard on his tongue.

'Carpenter's waiting for you,' he said to Keddy.

And Keddy, to whom the presence of Mr. Carpenter seemed the last straw, had stood dazed while Wilton spoke. Not a word of that oration failed of its effect. He looked at his watch, dully, with some idea of seeing how long Carpenter had waited.

'All right,' he said, 'I'll go.'

But as he reached the door there came through the window the sound of voices in the quad. He turned back. He looked at Wilton, whose eyes were never off him. But there was no suspicion of relenting. Keddy swung off to the window and looked out.

'My dear Tatham,' said Wilton in his cheerful way, 'I'm afraid I haven't half made the thing clear to you. It's so difficult while Keddy is here. It makes him feel sick if one says things straight out. But when he goes I'll explain it all. I must make you understand that there's nothing in Keddy but a perfectly harmless love of sensations. You see, now, he's found a sensation out of the window. I'm another. So are you. It would be perfectly absurd for Carpenter to think there's any real harm in him.'

It was a curious occupation for one in Wilton's danger to continue buoyantly reciting all that would give most pain to the one man likely to strike a blow on his behalf. He was, however, not in a mood of great circumspection. Nor was he ever averse from driving up the odds against himself.

Something of the truth was beginning to dawn on Tatham's mind. Keddy had clearly been attacking Wilton's vices. What a pity! How stupid! Though, indeed, it proved that Tatham had been right all along in his principle of kindness.

'Look here, do sit down,' said Wilton to him very cordially, while the voices beneath the window continued intermittent and indistinct. 'Will you have whisky? Oh, we'd better wait till Keddy goes. He has got a fit of æsthetic horror about vices. It might make him feel sick.'

Then Keddy's head came in again at the window. Slowly he walked to the door. He leant his back against it, Wilton watching him with polite surprise.

'It's all right, Bobby,' he said, wrapping up each word in a separate cover of defensive sullenness. 'They're not coming to this room. Arthur has taken them away.' Then he went out, and Tatham cleared his throat.

'Wilton——' began this Rupert of good works, for he saw that the very first thing was to make peace between the separated friends.

'What? What?'

Once more Tatham felt the situation tenser than he understood. For the moment the door had shut on Keddy, Wilton's easy animation changed to an unapproachable abstraction.

'Oh, wait a bit.' Wilton threw away his cigarette, took another from the box on the table, lighted it, and watched the match burn out. Tatham began to feel himself for all practical purposes nonexistent. For a moment Wilton stood still and watched the smoke curling up from his fingers. The focus of his eyes changed, and he looked into space. Like a dazed man realizing facts he whistled softly. Then he strode over to the window and looked out.

It seemed to Tatham that there was so much purpose in this action that he too went over and looked out of another window. So they saw the same event out there in the quad, each with his own degree of comprehension. Of those whose voices had sounded below the window, four, down the middle path, still stood and talked. One was Curly, known by his height. The one who stood so characteristically with his hand at the back of his neck was Pollock. The others were unknown. Towards them slowly, over the grass, went Keddy, hands in pockets, head sunk low. Wilton knew the look that would be on his face. Tatham knew only that his direction was not towards Mr. Carpenter.

It was a very short scene that was acted out there on the path with trees to right and left and the dim grey buildings for background. Also it was dumb show. It was only that Keddy joined the group, that something was said, something indistinct, and that then, first Pollock, then Curly, then the others, went off slowly down the path. And, finally, that Keddy stood there looking after them, motionless, till they turned the corner at the end. Then it looked as if he kicked a pebble along the gravel, and he struck off slowly to his own staircase.

Tatham went back to the fireplace, and braced himself.

'Wilton,' he said, 'you mustn't think anything of what Keddy says. I know he's rather narrow in his ideas, and he hasn't quite the right spirit just yet. But you must try not to mind. I know he's rather trying. He's been rather spoilt by being made too much of. And he's not very tactful. But he has a good heart really. The way you treated him to-night will do him a lot of good, but to-morrow you must—er——'

Tatham stopped. His voice had been growing steadily less serene as Wilton approached him from the window. He began to regret his intervention. He saw that he had underestimated Wilton's wrath. He was flurried. He floundered.

'Keddy did deserve it,' he said. 'He's a prig. He deserved every word, I admit.'

This concession was by no means in the tone he adopted

to the Tathamites. But no Tathamite had ever looked as Wilton looked now.

'Oh,' said that formidable person, very near to Tatham, 'so Keddy is a prig, is he?'

'Well, he's rather——'

Wilton pointed to the door.

'Go out of this room,' he said, 'and if ever you dare to come in here again I'll smash your face in.'

Thus, in the matter of Tatham, did Wilton at last reach the limit of his patience. And Tatham went.

That evening, therefore, it happened that the only incident which Keddy did not see was the single one from which he might have got some satisfaction. But he did not see it. It was long before he heard of it. Wytham he had experienced, and the sickening wretchedness of the drive home. In the menacing crowd he had seen the pictures of public opinion as it regarded his friend. In Wilton's room he had winced at every word of the punishment Vitality had seen fit to give him. Here, in the quad, he had tasted his unsweetened loneliness when old friends spoke coldly, and walked away from him. None of these things had he missed, only Tatham shrinking from the glint of Bobby's eyes. And now, when least he could bear it, was Mr. Carpenter and another friendship strained to breaking point.

Dismally and wearily, coming from many storms, he climbed his staircase and faced the clergyman. In spite of all he could not help thinking of a hungry lion two hours after feeding time. It was so like Mr. Carpenter never to have opened a book or found cigarettes or food or anything. But the restlessness of him! To Keddy who wished to drop in a heap and hear, see, do, nothing at all for ever more, the sight of Mr. Carpenter, flashing his eyes and biting his lips, and bristling at all points with ominous energy, seemed more than he could bear. But the unbearable, in such cases, is generally borne. There is a form of endurance among those who taught Keddy his Oxford manners which is based on a vague idea that *noblesse oblige*. So he pulled himself together, and gave himself a suitable kicking for his neglect of Mr. Carpenter's

invitations. It had been beastly rude of him. He was really awfully sorry. But this Wytham business had rather worried him, as Mr. Carpenter might imagine.

The clergyman certainly did not expect the subject of Wytham either to be introduced by Keddy or to be treated as an excuse for social shortcomings. At the apologies he nodded absently ; at the word ' Wytham ' he sucked his lips.

' You have been there to-night ? '

' Yes,' said Keddy ruefully.

' With Wilton ? To see that—er—woman ? '

Keddy confessed to both charges.

Mr. Carpenter paced the room in silence.

' Malcolm,' he said presently, with his eyes to the ground, ' I shall not ask you any questions about that woman, or about Wilton. Should I be making any mistakes, you will correct me.'

Again there was silence. Keddy went and leant against the writing-table, his hands behind his back, and there he stayed while the rain descended and the floods came.

' I understand, er—Malcolm, that you have sacrificed many of your own dislikes to Wilton in this matter of Wytham. I understand that you have not found very much pleasure in this affair.'

' Pleasure ! Oh Lord ! '

Pollock was right, thought Mr. Carpenter. He stood still, looked at the floor, and then at Keddy sharply.

' You have been unhappy, Malcolm.'

With all his restless insistence he had been a friend of whom Keddy was fond, and now a dash of sympathy was in his voice. So it was to the friend, not to the confessor, that Keddy laid his sick heart bare.

' I've been simply wretched,' he said. ' I can't swallow these things in the way Bobby does. It has an effect on me. I simply can't stand it.'

The tones were Keddy's most impressive. The appeal for sympathy was undisguised. Yet all that Mr. Carpenter did was to nod his head in acknowledgment of the information. He puzzled Keddy. He gave the impression of having something up his sleeve. His restlessness



was cooling to a detachment almost uncanny. He resumed his walk, and was silent.

Then came the crash.

'Malcolm'—and Mr. Carpenter measured out his crisp words steadily—'I am, and so long as you allow it I shall remain, in the position of your spiritual adviser. It is my duty to tell you that you are living in revolt against God.'

The pronouncement ended smartly on that great word of one syllable. Keddy's mouth opened. The method of attack was wholly unexpected.

'It is my duty to tell you, Malcolm, that you have placed your soul in peril. You are guilty of grave sin, and until you have brought yourself to repentance you have no right to partake of the benefits of the Church. I do not mind, I do not care, which of your actions we take first. The solemn promise you gave me a month ago, which you have broken, the parents whose confidence you have abused, the friend whose sins you have assisted, the woman you have helped to ruin, or God's honour which you have shamed by your deeds. But I think you will understand me best when I tell you that you have stood by your friend Wilton at the hour of his moral peril, and have lent your hand to assist in his destruction. You have that sin upon your conscience, and I do not think that you could have one heavier.'

Now of all the known varieties of Mr. Carpenter's methods, the hinted accusations, the moderated blame, the partial condonation, the 'dear old boys,' caresses, and agonized appeals for prudence, Keddy had expected certainly the gravest. But this pitiless procession of stern words was nothing short of staggering. Mr. Carpenter seemed a different man. A new impersonal majesty wrapped him round. Once more the boy's dulled senses grew acute to wince and suffer in calamity.

'You have told me,' Mr. Carpenter continued, 'that you regard these things with dislike. And I must tell you in reply that your sin is not less grave because you had no pleasure in it. And in your heart you will see that from beginning to end your conscience and your own

purity have warned you through the disgust you felt. You have disregarded these warnings as you disregarded mine. You have entered on sin with your eyes open.'

Still with his head bowed Mr. Carpenter paced the room.

'You have given me to understand from time to time,' he said again, 'that you hoped to do something for your friend Wilton's welfare. You acted in your own fashion and on your own responsibility. I am afraid that all you have done is to give your countenance and your active help to the completion of his moral ruin.'

'Mr. Carpenter,' said Keddy, 'Bobby has really finished with it all. I know it. To-day was the end.'

'To-day,' said the unrelenting priest, 'has been the occasion, unless you correct me, of an act which nothing can undo. One more man has fallen into deadly sin. One more woman has been brought to ruin. You are accountable to God for your share in this.'

Keddy did not answer.

'I do not wish,' said Mr. Carpenter, 'to blame you for having neglected the warnings I have given you. That is a personal matter between ourselves, and matters little. And I will not do more than remind you that you have deceived me, given me your word, and broken it. But it is my duty to point out to you plainly that your spiritual state is extremely serious. You are in possession of Catholic truth, and you bear the full responsibility for your actions. Until you bring yourself to repentance your sin stands between you and the Lord's body. You are cut off from the means of grace.'

There was a bit of paper on the floor on which Keddy fixed his eyes as he had fixed them on the horse's ears. There was nothing for him to say.

Again Mr. Carpenter broke the pause, speaking coldly and quietly.

'I understand that you propose to spend July in Somerset with Wilton. Your position with regard to Wilton is this, that you have now known him for two terms, and you have shown very clearly that your friendship with him is harmful both to him and to yourself. The dangers were obvious from the first. It is now plain

that you have not strength to resist them. I am sorry to say that I cannot advise you to accept his invitation for July.

‘Lastly, I must impress upon you again that I take the gravest view of your present spiritual state. I need not remind you of the course the Church has appointed for you to follow, to confess your sin to God, to seek absolution, and to amend your life. Until you take that course I cannot be responsible for your welfare. Should you at any time wish to see me again I shall be in Oxford till the third of July, when I go to my home in Yorkshire. Now, Malcolm, good-bye.’

Then the priest became the man, and the boy struggled back to his pitiable civility. Mr. Carpenter took up his hat and stick. Keddy went over and opened the door. He struck a match to light the dark staircase. Mr. Carpenter, following, put out his hand.

‘Good-night, Malcolm.’

‘I’ll come across the quad with you,’ said Keddy painfully.

‘No, Malcolm, I’d rather you didn’t. I’d rather you didn’t. Good-night.’

So the sound of his footsteps grew faint in the distance, and Keddy went back to his room. Instinctively he went over and leant in the same position against the writing-table with his head low. And that young master at home, why the devil did he say that the years at Oxford were the happiest of one’s life ?

## CHAPTER XIV

### ORCHARD WILTON

THE truth must be told about Keddy. Though his story lose all its interest thereby, it must be confessed that he had no great aptitude for sustained unhappiness. Mr. Carpenter had inflicted wounds, and had prescribed the method by which those wounds might and should be healed. But he showed no way of healing the wounds inflicted by Bobby. In that quarter the reconciliation did not come so easily. Keddy wrote a note that pleased Mr. Carpenter very much. But there was nothing he could write to Bobby. He slept, however, and ate his meals, and the hands of his watch went round as before. With an agreeable aunt and cousins he experienced the drawing-rooms of Mayfair in June. How often in these scenes has innocence found out the hollowness of life ! Keddy did not. He rather found fullness, and to be happy again seemed pleasantly familiar. Perhaps the life was a trifle more energetic than he would have cared to live for long ; but a fortnight was the full measure of it, and a fortnight that brought promise for the future. First came a short note from St. Saviour's House to say that Mr. Carpenter, because of new circumstances, advised him to visit Wilton. Secondly, from Wilton himself, the unreconciled friend, came a telegram more curt than even economy required. The day, the hour, of Keddy's arrival at Taunton were commanded. Keddy obeyed, and serenely read a novel through the western counties on the day appointed. At which end of the train his luggage might be, or whether, indeed, that very charming

porter at Paddington had ever put it in the train at all, he did not know. Bobby's first words were on this subject. 'Oh, you silly ass!' he commented. 'But then, you always were an ass, weren't you?' Thus did apologies, reconciliations, and forgiveness become as facts accomplished between them in a dozen words not bearing on the subject. *Non Angeli, sed Angli.*

Those who built houses in the time of King James did something more than raise a splendid monument to the newborn greatness of Britain. A monument of course they made, though doubtless from a commonplace desire to please their poor ephemeral senses. They housed in bricks and mortar the spirit of a people that had found itself at last, just as the cathedrals that came before them held the spirit of a world all glorious in the unity of Catholic truth. The Jacobean houses are the cathedrals of national consciousness. They are also, and this is another achievement of those builders, mines of emotion for others as well as historical sentimentalists. The connoisseur goes round them, guide-book in hand, delighting in ponderable objects as others delight in ideas. In and out of this house to which Keddy was driving in Bobby's trap such people went, sightseers and guests as well, viewing the great grey mass from this side and that, gaping at the tall chimneys, at the stone figures which look down from above, at curious coats of arms that stand out boldly over doors, and trembling at the curves and bulges which time had brought to the outlines of the walls. These are two classes for whom the builders worked, historians and connoisseurs. Keddy was neither. He did not look more reverently at aged oak and stone than at the tea and honey they gave him with their welcome in the hall. So it would seem that they who built the house had laboured in vain so far as Keddy was concerned, and amid the splendours of the Jacobean house, general and particular, he must be a rank barbarian. However, it was not altogether so. Keddy, if challenged, would have found a reason why the house was not wasted upon him. Tea and honey can be eaten in a villa at Balham as well as here, you might have told him, but he

would have spotted something wrong in the assertion. The people, too, the very straight and white old grandfather, the maiden aunt whose life seemed like an endless Sunday evening with cows in the broad meadow and the soft bell calling one to church ; these, with a boy like Bobby to ride, shoot rabbits, and be heir, may be found in humbler homes than Orchard Wilton. But Keddy would have revolted then. The bare idea of transplanting these people would have opened his eyes to a good part of the meaning and value of the place. He would have been exacting. Nothing but these dark panelled walls should be the background for Bobby's aunt and her embroidery ; Bobby's grandfather must stand nowhere but on the broad stone steps in front, between the twin pairs of pillars, beneath the round arch with the arms of Bobby's people carved above him, and the rows of vast stone windows to right and left and far above. Nowhere else must Bobby be the imperious host, himself the guest unceasingly content. For Keddy would have argued that it was all one, and all delightful and never to be changed. Whatever began it, house, family, or Jacobean builder, not a stone would he have let fall from the walls he never stared at, not a chip from the carving whose date and character he did not care to know, for it had all one meaning. It was a home more homelike than his own, and in it was a friend immeasurably more prized than the man whom at Oxford hostility might break but could not bend. He found here a new Bobby ; he sat in the tall rooms with the pictures, he walked in the corridors between the pikes of Royalists, he stood by the famous fireplace in the hall, he strolled on the terrace when the sun was down, and he found that all these things were modes and forms of Bobby, who was sprung from the loins of the place. The house and household gave a new idea of him. He looked at him, and saw again and again that the idea was true. So to Orchard Wilton came the poet to write his English poem, and the connoisseur to pore upon its rare and curious things whose beauty Keddy could not see. But Keddy saw Orchard Wilton and its heir as one, the home and the friend, two things that owed their present charm

to one another. Therefore, for Keddy too the Lord had blessed the house, and even to the barbarian their labour was not lost that built it.

Except at the time of the coming-of-age celebrations the party in the house was small. Sir Francis Wilton, the grandfather, appeared seldom except at meals, and sometimes on the terrace. He was deaf, and was known to spend ever more of his time each day in preparing for another world. To Keddy he showed a spacious courtesy from the first, and charged it with some gratitude when Keddy learned the knack of the clear enunciation which carried conversation through deaf ears. His family prayers and church building were not the last spasms of the orthodox *roué*, but the habits of a life that had been nothing if not godly. And Keddy detected in the old man's attitude to his heir a mixture of pride that the boy could ride straight with fear lest in other ways he might be going crooked. Some awkward moments, indeed, he had in cross-examination on this subject. But always at the end the old man said that he had made him feel more happy.

Miss Wilton, whose age Keddy never dared to guess, was of her father's way of thinking in all matters. It was Bobby's mother who led what might be called the opposition. As Bobby explained, she had lived in India, and that is decidedly a fast thing to do. 'My father must have been rather a sportsman, and the old man never quite forgave my mother for not quarrelling with him.' But to Keddy she seemed the gentlest vaguest creature he had ever met. Quietly but firmly as the days wore on she would draw him to deserted corners of the garden, and bring from the storehouse of her memory tale upon tale of Bobby's childhood and schoolboy years. Need it be said that from the very first of these communications she discovered Keddy to be quite delightful? She never cross-examined him in the manner of Sir Francis. Sometimes she spoke with curious frankness of young men in the army whose wild oats were sown successfully, and brought up crops of virtues. She was a good deal older than most women with sons of twenty-one.

Of the opposition party also was Mary Wilton, the daughter of Sir Francis's son in the navy. She was a girl of nineteen. She had come to Orchard Wilton on a kind of long lease from her people, and as neither Sir Francis nor Mrs. Wilton nor Bobby nor Aunt Elizabeth were patterns of discretion it did not take long for Keddy to understand that Mary might one day share the honours of the baronet that was to be. Bobby handled the idea without haste, and not without pleasure. He was fond of Mary, who was fresh and fair and interested in the proper things. Twice a week with regularity he told Keddy that he was in love with her. The girl, in this position, behaved with excellent tact, so that Keddy doubted if she had any views about Orchard Wilton except that it and its inmates were delightful.

She was of the opposition, it has been said. But the line between the two parties was very thin. It rested only on a shade of doubt as to whether Mrs. Wilton would rise to quite the proper pitch of moral indignation in regard to matters that had no sort of connection with the life of Orchard Wilton. As Bobby's character was under no substantial cloud, as the character of his father was not to be mentioned to the widow, very little practical matter of contention was left. But Sir Francis in his heart suspected her. He suspected her, and who shall say that this did not add to the interest of his life ?

Such was the house and such the family in which Keddy spent the month of July with the stress and strain of Oxford well behind him. He had said that Bobby's description of it sounded dull. Perhaps he was right. At Orchard Wilton the days had a way of being like each other. Some mornings began with a dip in the pond, where the small yews of the west garden made for tolerable decency. Then breakfast was a lingering meal. Perhaps there was a parcel of novels from Mudie's which could be unpacked and given a preliminary glance. Presently it struck them that riding was the thing, and of riding there was much. Sometimes Mary Wilton was with them. After luncheon there might be a dispute as to what to do, a dispute that took a long, long time to settle.



It might even happen that before they agreed to go out potting rabbits some neighbours from three miles off would rumble up the drive and bring a stranger to be taken round the house. That, of course, was Bobby's task, with Keddy mocking him wherever suitable. And after tea the novels were remembered, Sir Francis must have a game of billiards after dinner, and sometimes, when ten o'clock prayers were finished, with whisky and a change of clothes, they would set out through the park to enjoy the cool hours in the woods that were lonely and dark, and, if imagination helped, exciting.

But the very monotony of level, pleasant days kept Keddy rippling with wonder. Incongruity stirs the imagination more strongly and generally than any other relation of things, and the early days at Orchard Wilton were in continuous contrast with the times that had gone before. There were, of course, many practical occupations for Keddy, when over and over again he tried to beat Bobby at tennis, when he strove to keep him from stealing the book they both wanted to read, when he laboured with calm persistency to show the others that Bobby was really a fool. But between and among all this, as when the tennis rackets were thrown down, and he lit his pipe and watched the heir of Orchard Wilton lie down to woo kisses from an undemonstrative spaniel, he had to see and explain the difference between the Bobby of Oxford and the Bobby of Somerset. Someone had come to Bobby with a great screwdriver, he thought, and turned the screw that kept him tight and hard, so that now at a looser, gentler pressure he took his way about the sunlit fields and made no pictures as he went. He was coolly, quietly, enormously happy. The very look of him was different, for his hair was untidy, and his eyes more often focussed on things that were far away. Had you put your knuckle to his nose no sparks would have come out, thought Keddy now.

'Here,' he said, down by the well at the bottom of the slope from the stables, 'here, Keddy, look at that tunnel. Now there's a story about that. The water runs through that tunnel the Lord knows how far—oh, over a mile,

and once I drove all the geese in there when I was a kid, and piled up stones to stop them getting back this way.'

His very way of telling stories was an Orchard Wilton way. He would stop from time to time to roll his tongue round memories that pleased him.

'They came out at the other end eventually, but it was four days after. They stayed in that tunnel four days. Shall we do it again?'

But the unhappy Aunt Elizabeth must be considered, for the geese were her pride. So they dawdled on, and by the time they reached the end of the lingering story of what happened when the geese were in the tunnel and after they came out, of the anxiety and manœuvres to escape detection, of hourly visits to the tunnel's end, and the lamentable state of the victims on their return from Hades, then Bobby and Keddy were deep in the wood, and remembered that they had never any intention of walking a quarter so far. But it did not matter. Nothing mattered at Orchard Wilton. The afternoon was hot. There was nothing to do but to be slack and happy. So Bobby lay down where the moss was thick below the trees. A streak of wandering sunlight came and closed his eyes, and the sense of incongruity held Keddy again as he stood looking down at the nerveless loose-limbed rest and contentment of the boy who made a record in swishings at school.

And other more glaring contrasts came in quick succession. Indeed, it was not long before Keddy pinned the charge of incongruity, not to the present, but to the memory of wrecked rooms and tragedies in Oxford and Wytham. He would come down late for dinner, because half the time when he ought to have been dressing he had spent looking out of the great wide window of his room in delicious cogitation of the problems Bobby offered. One day it was a party of elderly ladies who drove over from heaven knew where, and diffused in the hall of Orchard Wilton a stodgy rusticity that would have wrung tears even from the Presbyterian uncle in Perthshire. Of course they asked if Bobby was at home; everyone did that. They hoped that Bobby would take them to see the rose-

garden, and Keddy was moved to compassion for his friend. But Bobby strolled in, did himself well in bread and honey, and took off the whole party to the rose-garden without a sigh. Afterwards, of course, he said it had been a bore. But Keddy fixed him with accusing eyes, and said, 'I tell you what it is ; you like it.'

There was money to be spent at Orchard Wilton ; it was possible to build new cottages in place of old ones, to enlarge the stables, plan changes in the gardens, and play about with improvements in the house. A fair amount of administrative work seemed always on hand, and Bobby, without haste or excitement, busied himself and Keddy with this. Everyone, of course, had a voice in every matter—the grandfather, the family, the servants, and the neighbours. But Keddy observed that invariably the course adopted was the course which Bobby liked. There was no friction, no warmth of opinion either way, but Bobby's wishes were always in the end accomplished.

So the days wore on, and the novelty of Orchard Wilton became smooth with use and habit. Keddy forgot Vitality ; he forgot that Bobby was the handsomest man in college ; he lost his sense of contrast. And while about the lanes and farms of Somerset his mind grew used to peace and ease, and to the sight of Bobby in an old coat that did not match his breeches, there grew familiar also, till his dulled perceptions ceased to bite on the idea, a Bobby whom no one crossed, no one challenged, no one blamed, and all the world admired and liked.

Thus, as the new order blotted out the very memory of the old, the process was helped by many things they did, and by one thing they refrained from doing. For while they went about together, walking in the woods, riding in the lanes, sitting by the fire at night, they talked on every subject except one. They talked of those administrative details where Bobby had such great authority. They expatiated gorgeously on each thing they enjoyed, though it were only another fine day. They played with the past, compared the earliest ideas that memory could recall from childhood, lingered over

stories of knickerbocker days, and laughed and thrilled at the many adventures of Bobby at home and at school. But all the time, through Bobby's talk and Keddy's questions and the ideas that came therefrom, it happened that they hardly ever touched a topic that made them think of Oxford. A tacit regard for common comfort stayed their tongues from the subject.

Anyone knowing the ordinary tactics of friendship would have agreed that they were wise to keep off dangerous ground. For Oxford brought associations, and might have brought contention. After all there was a difference between them. Of Keddy it must be remembered that whether he was laughing at the vicarage girls, or striving to acquire a taste for Sir Francis's priceless rum, or maliciously waiting for the next chance of making Bobby blush before the family, yet he was, in an accepted sense, a religious boy. While Bobby, though placable and lazy now, though contented to ride and read novels and flirt mildly with the girl he meant to marry by-and-by, was nevertheless a reprobate.

Only at the end of the month their prudent restraint broke down, and they talked of Oxford recklessly. They had walked over to the Pollocks' house in the afternoon, and in the evening after prayers it was warm enough, if you wore a tweed coat, to sit out in the garden in the grey and silver light. There is a low stone wall that runs the length of the house and borders the south garden. From the garden side it is the height for sitting down with the greatest comfort that a wall can give, and over backwards a drop of eight feet would take you straight to the rough grass of the park. But no one would look backwards, except occasionally to see the moon. For in the front the tall yew hedges lead up to the corners of the house, and between them, on your right and left, are two stone pools with water moving in the moonlight. In each of these a lion fountain spouts out a silver arch. And beyond is the broad front of the house, pane upon pane of stone-set glass struck at an angle by the moonlight, and the nine worthies high above in the place where they have stood three hundred years below the balustered roof. If the

majestic calm of Jacobean stone and moonlight could sooth the rough moments of an awkward talk this was the time for Bobby and Keddy as they sat smoking on the wall.

They were led to it by their visit to Pollock.

'I used to like old Arthur,' Bobby said. 'But it's no good now. We shall always be enemies. Do you know, he's been talking about me down here, and the funny thing is that nobody believes him. The vicar is furious with him. It's his mother that talks really, the vixen, not Arthur himself.'

So the tales were not believed. The moonlight was on Bobby's face, but even the delicate pallor of moonlight on clear skin did not make it easy to see why evidence against this particular type of adventurous good-looking youth should be so lightly disregarded. But, then, was that more strange than to hear of 'old Arthur' in those tolerant tones? Somerset was becoming incongruous again, and the stillness of the night made wonder a pleasant feeling.

'Well, I've lost Arthur,' Bobby continued, 'in the Oxford rows, but I made another friend, my dear Keddy.'

'Who was that?' Keddy asked.

Bobby laughed, and watched the effect of an interesting announcement.

'Carpenter,' he said. 'Carpenter and I are bosom friends.'

'What the devil do you mean?' asked the astonished Keddy.

Water still spouted from the mouths of the stone lions, and the great front of the house stood up with the curious convex boldness that the moonlight lends to height and breadth. But all the impressions of the time were lost on Keddy as he heard the amazing story. Bobby had been to Carpenter. He had been to him on the very morning after the terrible night of Wytham and the excommunication.

'And I liked him,' he said. 'When he saw me come in it must have seemed to him as if he'd caught the eldest son of Satan. But he never said a single word about

Wytham or Gertrude or anything. In fact, he behaved like a gentleman, and I'm damned if I don't think he rather liked me.'

'Why did you go to him?' Keddy asked in his gravest cross-examination manner.

Was it so hard to see why? Bobby hesitated, and fell back, with a laugh, on the direct methods that suit pugnacious natures.

'My dear man, when you've played the complete swine to the one fellow you care for, and when there's someone else whose game it is to make that fellow chuck you, well, something has to be done. I went to Carpenter ready to go on my knees and lick the dust and take all the scourging of the Church, and, damn it, it turned out to be the easiest job you can imagine. I don't know how it happened. I just said it would be a bore if you chucked me, and Carpenter turned round and scorched me up with his eyes, and rapped out that he hoped you wouldn't.'

'What else did you say to him?' asked Keddy relentlessly.

'Nothing; we talked about you.'

So Keddy was silenced, and had leisure to wonder what it had been like when Bobby sat in Mr. Carpenter's chair and they talked to each other. What had Bobby said? Something, of course, that had made Mr. Carpenter write Keddy that letter telling him to come to Orchard Wilton. And what had it been? Mr. Carpenter did not climb down from definite positions for nothing.

'Bobby—did you tell Carpenter you were going to chuck women and all that?' he asked.

But it was not so. They never discussed his vices at all, said Bobby. And so there followed a long silence between them, as was not uncommon, and Keddy at last filled a pipe with particular care.

'How beastly that Wytham night was!' he said. It was not so hard to say it, for the present night made Wytham seem like something one has read in a book.

'I did hate it,' he continued, as he lighted his pipe; 'it was one thing after another, you know. It was like eating rotten eggs, and having a nerve killed, and having

stuffy dreams, everything more beastly than the last. I hated it like the devil. But it made things clearer. I understand it all much better now.'

It became Bobby's turn to cross-examine, and he did it in a lighter way than Keddy.

'Oh, it gave me a whole new philosophy,' Keddy explained. 'Carpenter came, you see, and put it all in a religious way, exactly what I'd been feeling all over my skin, you know. I'd been saying things were beastly, and Carpenter said they were sins. And the fact is, Carpenter was right. The things you think are beastly are really wrong. Wytham was wrong, you see, and it would be wrong to eat a black-beetle or take a snake to bed with you, or pick your mother's eyes out with the pincers. Because they'd all be so horrid to do. Now smoking and sitting out here and saying things about Mrs. Pollock's roses are right, you see, because they're all rather jolly.'

'And if Wytham ever comes again?' Bobby asked, while their shadows crept across the grass in front. Keddy turned round on him slowly.

'Now, that's really very clever of you, Bobby. That's just exactly the point. I know it's wrong, you see, because it's beastly; but it would be equally beastly to leave you in the lurch, and so one gets in the devil of a mess. Both beastly, both wrong, you see.'

'And which would you choose?'

'I'd give you a hell of a time!' said Keddy.

'And after you'd done that?' Bobby asked.

Perhaps he was sorry for the directness of the question. He got off the wall, turned round to the moon, and laughed down at Keddy mockingly. Furthermore, to relieve any possible strain, it needed but one swift push of his knee on Keddy's middle, and over the eight-foot wall his victim hung helpless by his legs, unable to do more than hiss out hideous curses till Bobby chose to let him up. It was just on such occasions that Keddy's language showed what progress may be made by those who have never been to school.

Again they stood on the grass of the south garden, and at the same instant they yawned. It was a convenient

accident when they happened to be sleepy at the same moment, for there was then no quarrelling about bedtime. Slowly they strolled across the noiseless velvet lawn to the stone steps opposite.

'I'm glad we talked about Oxford,' Keddy said. 'It makes one see how ripping everything is down here.'

Bobby agreed, very thoughtfully.

They climbed the wide stone steps, and turned round in the open doorway to look farewell at the moon.

'You see, people have only two ways of treating me,' said Bobby. 'Either they hate me and try to hurt me, or they like me and spoil me absurdly as they do down here. That's the difference.'

Then the heavy door was shut and bolted, and Keddy with the heir of Orchard Wilton crossed the firelit hall. They took their candles from the great black table at the end. The feeling of the house was sleepy, and therefore sympathetic. The hall and its feeble firelight they left behind them, passed through the swinging-door, and up the broad stone staircase, where portraits to right and left stood out alive for a moment as their candles went by. Then it was to be remembered that all this day they had spent on horse or foot, and up the wide, red-covered steps their legs went heavily. This is the tiredness which is mere delight. A board creaked in the corridor, and Bobby pressed a punitive finger and thumb into Keddy's neck, for it was bad to wake Sir Francis. Cautiously, therefore, they crept along the oak boards between the pikes and the leather coats of slain Cromwellians on either side, till at the far end the wooden spiral staircase took them to their own quarters. They parted, Bobby going through the gallery while Keddy turned in at his door by the top of the stairs.

There is a point at which satisfaction almost suffocates, like an excellent cigar which is rather too strong. One feels oneself to be losing most of the flavour of joy because each little particle absorbs one's whole attention. Physical tiredness is then a perfect sedative remedy. In his big oak-panelled bedroom Keddy stood and looked at the black four-poster as if it had done something he approved



of. He took off a garment or two in response to the promise of the bed; then laziness prevailed again, and between the huge curtains opposite the fireplace he went up one high step into what was like another room, and was, in fact, the window. There was a writing-table in the middle of it, and panes of glass all round. Keddy leaned out, and took the assistance of the moonlit garden in trying to realize exactly how happy he was.

No more fighting and hating and discomfort and disgust. There was nothing to spoil the taste of Bobby now. Why, it might even be possible to have Arthur and Curly in the house and be as jolly as in the first few weeks at Oxford.

But still he was tired, and with a spurt of energy he returned and pulled off more clothes. But the thought of Bobby's visit to St. Saviour's House came up again, and transfixed him even at the crisis of undressing. These delays were unavoidable. What a clever old devil Carpenter was! How clever of him not to talk of Bobby's vices! To-morrow a letter should go off to Carpenter smelling with the smell of Orchard Wilton.

At last the candles were put out, and Keddy rolled into bed, a thing good to do, good and enjoyable in every separate muscle that had worked in the cause of pleasure all day long. It was comfortable inside his head too, for, instead of exciting ideas of incongruity and Oxford, he began to hear things from far away, Aunt Elizabeth observing that she had dropped a stitch, Bobby cursing lightly at missing a rabbit, Sir Francis clicking out, 'Eh, what?' And the next thing was a jarring, scraping rattle of brass rings on bamboo cane, and the man was flinging the heavy curtains back from across the window.

The smell of the morning came in, only slower than the burst of sudden sunlight. There was dew in it, and the feel of freshness; it made you think of the woods before even you thought of breakfast. The early morning, of course, is the time when the sense of smell is keenest, and as Keddy moved his legs to new cool parts of the bed the faint scent of lavender from pillows and sheets was mixed with the freshness of the morning. Another sort of fragrance also his nostrils or his expectations caught,

and he edged off to the side of the bed where a cup of tea stood waiting on the small table. With it were his letters, a financial appeal from brother Johnny at school, and a note from Curly Edwards. Curly had big sprawling writing, which Keddy enjoyed on the envelope before opening the letter. It looked as if he wrote from his shoulder with an artificial wrist and elbow. In this letter he explained that Keddy was to be in Invernesshire by the twelfth, where Curly's father had taken a moor. Incidentally, in the intervals of shooting, he could have his head smacked for being scug enough to go and stay with Bobby. George Tremayne would be there, and so on.

So Curly had forgiven him. Here was prosperity again, and the drying of tears, and the joy that cometh in the morning. Certainly he would stay with Curly. It would amuse him very much, when the time came, but there was no need to think of it to-day. The room was full of sunlight. The massive chests and tables had lost their candle-light dignity. In at the window and out through the door which the footman had left open, the fragrance of the morning passed in a gentle warm breeze that made the house as secondary a thought as Curly's invitation. Keddy stretched his arms and legs, and lived for the day out of doors. Was there anything on? Or would it be another day of pottering about? Would Bobby come to drag him out for a dip in the pond?

Yes, he heard the light thud of bare feet on boards, and Bobby came in. But he had forgotten to wind a towel round his neck this time. Indeed, he came slowly and looked thoughtful. Thoughtful moods are made to jeer at.

'Bobby, it's a perfect scandal. You go to bed night after night in things you wore when you were fifteen. You ooze out all over the place like a fat woman. It's simply disgusting. If you don't get new ones I'll take those rags and burn them.'

But Bobby had sat down on the bed, and did not respond in the least to Keddy's treatment. He did not even smack his face. Was he angry? thought Keddy. He had a folded paper in his hand, that crackled as he

squeezed it and released it. And in his face, through the pink of the morning, Keddy saw a darkness that was uncomfortably familiar.

So he jeered again, declared that to wear old clothes was nothing but a regrettable form of vanity, and in the next breath asked, 'Bobby, what's up?'

'It's Gertrude Oakes again,' said he. 'God! If I had that girl at the cart's tail!'

'Oh, damn Gertrude Oakes,' said Keddy.

That was a protest from amid the comfortable cool linen against an intrusion which surely the walls of Orchard Wilton should have withstood. Was Gertrude Oakes to come in where the warm breeze brought the smell of the woods? Was it a letter?

'A letter! Lord, no; she stopped writing letters weeks ago. She stopped when the third one was sent back unopened.'

Keddy was awed. There was a feeling of war and trouble that he did not like.

'Then—I didn't tell you—I had a letter from a damned lawyer. I didn't answer it. When others came I burnt them without reading them. It was such a bore to have that kind of thing down here.'

Yes, Keddy understood that. He understood it very well. But he shoved the bedclothes up over his neck, and his eyes moved up and down between Bobby's face and the paper he held in his hand.

'And,' said Bobby, speaking slowly with averted eyes, 'they came to my room just now, and said a man wanted to see me. I thought it must be the fellow from Taunton about that horse. So I told them to fetch him up. And it was a cur of a solicitor's clerk in spectacles. I suppose the dirty devil had come down by the night train. He stuck this down on my bed and went away.'

Bobby opened the crisp paper he had held, and displayed the writing that only custom can rob of its impressiveness. Among the handwriting and the smaller print, all unharmonious as they were, the ominous words stood bold and black. 'Edward the Seventh by the Grace of God.' Then, hand-written, the jarring formal

designation of a person who wore outgrown pyjamas :  
'To Robert Francis Wilton.' And large and black again :  
'We Command You.' That was enough for Keddy.  
'Oh, damn it, it's a writ !'

'The plaintiff's claim is for damages for breach of promise of marriage.'

It was hardly necessary to read that, but Bobby turned the writ round and showed it before he flung the thing away.

So all the time, while they tramped with their guns about the woods, while their horses trotted on the country roads, while neighbours refused to hear scandal, and the great house of Orchard Wilton had seemed to exist with its tall grey walls and its heavy oak all as a background for the heir, this doom had been preparing. The Oakes woman had come in pursuit, and crossed the gulf between Wytham and Somerset.

'It's she who has you at the cart's tail, Bobby, not you her.'

Bobby looked dark and dangerous. But Keddy's dismal words were not without meaning.

'Damn it, there must be something we can do !'

Keddy jumped out of bed, stood in the sunlight, and was sure of it.

## CHAPTER XV

### FIAT JUSTITIA

It was on the fourth day from the coming of the writ. It was a Saturday evening, between six and seven o'clock. Half a mile across the park, by the gate which lets you out on the Bridgewater Road, Keddy and Bobby stopped. Keddy was in a long, light coat, and evening dress beneath it, and had before him a walk of two miles and more to the Pollocks' house for dinner. Life at Orchard Wilton had been anything but lazy of late, and now, for hours past, while the groom rode over with their urgent message to Arthur, while they waited for his return, while Keddy dressed, and while they came across the park, plans and schemes and hopes and fears had filled the narrow space between them. 'How will you manage him?' Bobby had asked so often. 'You had better say this; you had better say that;' and ever more reticent Keddy became as he drew nearer to the duel on which the fate of his friend depended. Bobby was not used to having his battles fought by other people. He interfered, perhaps, too much with suggestions and questions. Keddy grew silent, and even sulky. Here at the park gate he stopped.

'Bobby, I want you to go back. I've a devil of a lot to think about. I want to be alone.'

For this reason, for the sake of the quiet walk before the battle, he had refused to be driven to the Pollocks' in the trap. Bobby, therefore, acquiesced. And because of the stuff inside him, though his inactivity was painful, he slapped Keddy's back, and smiled, and said,

'Good luck!' He turned back. For a moment Keddy watched him kicking his way across the grass, slim and vital, with the insignia of Orchard Wilton, the well-worn shooting-coat and breeches, as though the hand of Miss Oakes had not closed round that new well-favoured life to crush it like an egg. However, the egg might still be saved, and Keddy started off along the Bridge-water Road to save it.

Had he such a lot to think about? Certainly, it did not sort itself very easily as he tramped along between the dusty, tall hedges. His mind would not take a clear, black and white impression of what he meant to say to Arthur. It would be a diplomatic duel, the hardest of his life, with terrible issues at stake. But while he strove to formulate appeals and arguments, he found, with shocks of recurring annoyance, that really he was thinking of nothing but stupid little points where the charm of Orchard Wilton had dazzled him. He wanted to knock up arguments for getting Arthur's indispensable help. But what was he really doing? He was thinking of the book he had been reading this time last Saturday evening in the window of the smoking-room, when Bobby sat opposite, with 'Dracula' cocked up on his knees, deep in the hollow of a big red chair, enjoying the slackness and comfort and the thrill and shudders of the story. Then had all the world been jolly and satisfactory and natural. And Miss Oakes was going to spoil the whole of it. She was going to snatch their books away, bring storms in at the window, drag them from their chairs, make war, hatred, ruin. She was a witch; she was a hag, to come like that when Bobby and he were reading. But was this the right way of preparing to battle with Arthur's prejudices? It was, indeed, the only way that Keddy could follow.

There was something pleasant, there was something actually comforting, about the way that Arthur welcomed him. Arthur was always so undisguisedly glad to see him; in one who found so many men and things intolerable it was really quite affecting. Besides, it was good of Arthur to have forgiven him for staying at

Orchard Wilton. With some anxiety, as he took Keddy up to his room, he asked the cause of the message the groom had brought. Why did Keddy so urgently need him? Had anything happened?

Yes, said Keddy; but he was not going to talk about it yet. Something had happened, and he must have hours and hours alone with Arthur to explain it. He must have the whole evening after dinner.

Pollock's father, a highly-placed official in a Government office, had rented for many years the large cottage in Somerset at which his family spent the summer months and occasional week-ends. His own holiday did not generally begin before August, but his wife and daughters had been settled here with Arthur since the end of June. Mrs. Pollock, of course, had her little failing, which, with the aid of a horse and trap, she was well able to indulge in the country. She was loquacious. Even with a guest from Orchard Wilton at her table she could not altogether keep back her familiar criticisms.

'I think Bobby is really a very nice boy,' she told Keddy, 'but there's no doubt they've done their best to spoil him. I don't know how it is at Oxford, but down here the whole neighbourhood seems to form itself into a Bobby Wilton Admiration League. He's heir to the big place, of course, and I must say he is extremely pleasant to everyone, but it is a pity—it always has been a pity—that they make so very much of him. It may spoil him for the future, you know. They talk about his good looks and his riding almost to his face. You might almost say the Vicar of Orchard Wilton preaches about it. I do think it's very much to Bobby's credit that he hasn't been spoiled. You must have noticed it.'

Yes, Keddy had noticed it. Indeed, he was almost as great an expert in the matter as Mrs. Pollock herself, had he chosen to let her know it.

'Well,' said she, 'it has always been the same, from the very earliest days. I don't believe that boy was ever punished for anything, except by his grandfather, of course. Sir Francis had some firmness, certainly, but all the others have simply bowed down from the first. We

thought when he went to school it might cure him—I mean, cure the way people treated him. But when he came back in the holidays it was just the same. Now, don't you think it's a pity ?

That was rather an embarrassing question, for if Keddy had a conviction on any subject under the sun, it was that the treatment of Bobby in Somerset was the reverse of a pity. He took the simple course of looking politely at Mrs. Pollock till she began to talk again.

Mrs. Pollock was not always good for Arthur's nerves. He said nothing about her. But when he shut the door on the departed ladies he turned back with a 'Now, Keddy,' which mingled a certain relief with the pleasure of a friend in his friend.

'Look here, we won't stop here long. We'll go down to my room in the garden. We can talk there. No one will interrupt us, and I've had the whisky taken out.'

Built of wood, and lined inside with wood, with ceiling and floor of wood, Arthur's room at the end of the garden was the scene of that diplomatic venture which Bobby and Keddy had planned in haste on the soft smooth lawn at Orchard Wilton. Was Bobby pacing the lawn now, between the lion fountains ? Was he wondering how Keddy would fare, anxious and impatient ? Keddy did not doubt it, and his heart beat badly with excitement at what he had to do.

The moths came in at the windows and died in heaps inside the oil lamp on the table. Creatures from the ivy crawled in and grew sleepy on the walls. Pollock and Keddy sat in wicker-chairs, their pipes filled from the jar on the stool between them, and there was a homely comfort that had made Keddy buoyant long before he led the talk to business.

'It's about Bobby,' he said at last.

Bobby, Bobby—everything was about Bobby. A shade of annoyance passed over Pollock's lean face. But it was so good to have Keddy sitting there—so like old times. He would not strike a jarring note on a night like this.

'Poor old Bobby,' he said very kindly. 'Is he in a mess ?'



‘He’s in a mess, and——’

It was not for effect that Keddy paused, but for Arthur’s eyes, which he must catch before he spoke again.

‘And whether he gets out of it or not depends on you.’

‘My dear Keddy——’

Keddy sat up in his chair. His eyes turned to the open window. He was becoming nervous, and the darkness outside was comfortable to look at. Pollock watched him curiously, for excitement was strange in Keddy.

‘Arthur, I’ve got to tell you the story, and you’ve got to listen. I can’t help it. You mustn’t mind. You remember that Oakes woman?’

Pollock was still master of himself. He remembered the Oakes woman. He could say it without a shudder.

‘Well, that night at Wytham—the last night of last term, you know—the whole thing happened, and Bobby promised to marry her. Now, don’t stop me yet. I’m going to tell you the whole story.’

With the promise of marriage came the touch of vulgarity, and Pollock shuddered then. But he let Keddy bear down his interruption. He lay back and looked out of the window, where Keddy was looking, while the story of Wytham, of Colquhoun and Keddy and Bobby and Gertrude—parts he had heard and parts he had not—was told him in bald, short sentences, faithful to fact and frugal of disgust.

‘So Bobby said they were engaged. Porker went away at once. Then I think Bobby was just going to tell her it was all a trick to dish Porker, only he didn’t. He looked at her, you know. And he didn’t tell her. I wanted to get away and go home. But Bobby told me to go out and meet old Oakes on the road, and keep him out, because Gertrude was so much upset.’

‘I see,’ said Pollock.

‘And, of course, I never understood about it till we were driving home after supper. Bobby told me then. It was all beastly. I was awfully stupid about it. I made Bobby wild, and when we got in, you know, we had that scene in the porch. I went up to his room,

because I thought those fellows were coming up to go for him. Then he made rather a beast of himself, and cursed me to Tatham, who was there. Then I went out, and he looked out of the window and saw you and Curly go away from me in the quad. Well, what do you think he did then? He was sick with himself for cursing me, and letting me in for all that business. He sat down straight away and wrote to the Oakes woman. I expect it was a fearful letter. He told her he didn't want to see her or hear of her again. He sent her packing, and when she wrote he sent back her letters without opening them. He only told me that part the other day. Well, you see what happened. Last Wednesday he got a writ in an action for breach of promise, and there's just the devil of a mess. That beastly woman is going for him. It's all been one filthy, sickening mess from beginning to end.'

Thus was the story brought to an end, and Pollock and Keddy looked at one another. And whether the manner of narration had been diplomatically wise or not, whether the naked confidence of Keddy had been well placed or ill, one vitally important point was won by him all unknowingly. He had made Pollock sorry for him. They stood on a footing of sympathy, and for the moment Pollock's disgust at the blackguard's trick was less intense than his pity for the obvious suffering of his friend.

'It was bad luck,' he told him. 'You hadn't expected anything quite like that. Nor should I have either. Bobby touched the lowest rung then. I didn't think Bobby would go as far as that. Great Scott!'

'Wait a bit,' said Keddy, who foresaw an attack of nervous horror that would draw vigour from its own expression. 'I've got more to tell you. You see, we got the writ on Wednesday. We didn't know what to do about it. We talked and talked, you know, and then we took the beastly thing into Taunton and showed it to a friend of Bobby's who's a lawyer. And he told us something would have to be done about it at once. So you see what happened. We were in a hole. We had to have lawyers and money and all that, and any day we

knew the Oakes people might write to Bobby's grandfather. So there was nothing for it but for Bobby to go to his grandfather himself and tell him. He told him he'd got into trouble with a woman, and the woman was going for him. And then—Arthur——'

Pollock suddenly remembered the opening words of the story. He jerked himself up straight in his chair. The nervous collapse was very, very near.

'Good Lord! What did you mean by saying it depended on me?'

Because the crisis had come, and because Pollock was getting excited, Keddy regained his coolness.

'It's this,' he said. 'The old man was fearfully upset. You can imagine what it was like. Bobby talked to him, and I talked to him, and Mrs. Wilton talked to him, and there was the devil of a row all that day. That was Thursday. Do you remember what Queen Elizabeth said? "My seat hath been the seat of kings, and I will have no rascal to succeed me." It was like that, with a lot of religion, too—funny religion, you know; not like Carpenter's. And he kept saying that Bobby was as good as engaged to Mary, and Mary couldn't marry a bad man. Well, he couldn't a bit make up his mind whether Bobby had been stupid and got caught by a designing woman, you know, or whether he was really a bad lot. Of course he didn't know what we know. He said he would help Bobby out of any scrape if he deserved it. He'd pay up anything for the name, and for Mary. But he wouldn't shield Bobby if he were really living a bad life. You know the sort of thing. He wouldn't be a cloak to guilt. And then—then, you see, there was yesterday, and it all went on again. And at last this morning he said he must go to someone who really knew what Bobby's life had been like at Oxford, and at school—someone he could trust, someone whose opinion he valued, someone who could speak about Bobby's character. And Arthur, he's coming to you.'

'God in heaven! Oh, my patience!'

The breakdown had come. Pollock must be forgiven, for, indeed, it was hard that the tentacles of Bobby's

loathsome affairs should clutch him as they did. He jumped up and paced about the room, calling heaven to witness his misfortunes.

‘He is coming,’ said Keddy, ‘to-morrow afternoon.’

What cruel penalties fall on those with blameless reputations ! Because he had the character of a straight, clean-living man, because his face was thoughtful and his manner grave with his elders, because he was old for his years, the unhappy Pollock was crossed with trials such as this. He paced the room and raved in bitter self-pity. But all that he said and did had little effect on Keddy, who waited.

Keddy mixed whisky in a glass. He needed it. He was pale, and the crux of his work was before him.

‘To-morrow afternoon,’ he said at last, for Arthur must be checked.

‘Oh, curse it, curse it ! What have I done that they should make *me* his executioner ?’

Keddy stood at the table and gulped down a lot of his whisky. He had a curious sensation of numbness, as if all his feelings had gone to sleep except one vivid intention. He had never felt anything like this before.

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ he said, ‘when you talk about executions. Look here, I want you to let me go on talking. I’ve got a lot to say.’

With a shrug of impatient despair Pollock flung himself in his chair again, and was silent.

‘Look here,’ said Keddy, standing before him and shaking round the remaining whisky in his glass, ‘I want to make you understand what this really means. You know what we think about the way Bobby goes on at Oxford. You know I hate it as much as you do. It’s beastly. Oh Lord ! I’ve seen how beastly it is. He’s low—he’s like a dirty beast in a third-class carriage. It makes you shudder and all that, and it makes me feel sick. But, Arthur, look here, you’ve seen him at Oxford, but you haven’t seen him down here. I mean, you haven’t lived with him here as I have. I can tell you that down here he’s just as clean and jolly and like other people as he is beastly at Oxford. Do you see what I

mean ? He's ripping ; he's happy ; he treats everybody well, and behaves like a decent fellow always. And I'll tell you why it is—I'll tell you what I've found out. It's simply and solely because at Oxford they hated him and punished him till he was savage. What Mrs. Pollock was saying at dinner is perfectly true. Down here they spoil him, and the result is he's simply the best fellow in the world. Now don't you see ? It's his chance. It's the way we can get rid of the beastly part of him and always have the jolly part. People *must* go on liking him and spoiling him—they simply must, or he's done for. And now it all depends on what you say to his grandfather to-morrow.'

Pollock sat silent ; now and then the corners of his mouth jerked down impatiently. Keddy's oration ended, and there was a dismal pause.

'Oh, what a confounded nuisance it all is !'

That was from Pollock's heart, but in answer to Keddy's reproachful look he apologized, put his own feelings aside, and gave his mind to the matter.

'Well, what is it that the old man wants me to tell him ?' he asked.

So Keddy explained again, and quoted large portions of his own and Bobby's talks with Sir Francis. And it came to this, that the grandfather would ask if Bobby were a fool or a knave. On that it all depended.

'And you want me to say that Bobby is a Galahad entrapped ?'

'That he isn't really a blackguard,' said Keddy ; 'that he's a good fellow ; that it's all been a beastly accident.'

At least he had the man's attention. He saw that however loathsome Pollock found his share in the business, he was giving it, at any rate, his mind. He was walking again now, swiftly up and down the room across the wooden floor and mats.

Ideas were knocking about in Keddy's head like stones in a rolling barrel, coming everywhere but to his mouth. He wanted, at this crisis, to tell Arthur a thousand things all vitally important. But all the converging arguments

whose palpable force he felt, when spoken, seemed so trivial. That Bobby showed dull people round the house, that he played billiards with Sir Francis, and patience with his aunt, that he could talk of Colquhoun with laughter instead of cursing, of Oxford with tolerance, that his fighting and hating were changed to play, clean and cool and wholesome, on the green lawns and fields where his limbs moved loosely and his mind was happy and affectionate, and only toyed with vice as a joke! How much of this could Arthur be made to see? Keddy did his best, and the words came easier and faster. Here and now, he said, was the time when Bobby might be made secure in this clean life or driven again to war, retaliation, bitterness, and sin.

Then Pollock began to state his case.

'Oh, Keddy, you were the most delightful boy I ever met!'

At this irrelevancy Keddy stared.

'If only Bobby had never existed!' said Pollock. 'Oh, damn it, damn it! Look here, I'm afraid you'll be sick with me; you'll never understand. But do put yourself in my place. The old fellow comes and asks me about Bobby. He's his heir; he's all he has got, and he is supposed to be going to marry Mary, who's a very nice girl. The old man has a right to know the truth, surely, Keddy, surely! What can I say? I know Bobby in and out. I don't care what you say about him; I know he was a plucky, reckless boy, and I know he has been steadily going down day by day into everything that's low and beastly. Great Heavens! What you've told me to-night has not done much to change my opinion. He is on the downward path. He's vicious.'

Quick as lightning Keddy cut in at this point. He felt his brain working like anything. As before, he took Curly for his instance, and out of his own mouth convicted Pollock of not objecting to a vicious man as such.

'It isn't Bobby's vices you hate. You only hate him because he has been low and hostile and at war with all the decent fellows. It's just exactly that sort of thing that he's getting rid of down here. Oh, Arthur, for God's

sake, don't wreck it now, just when he's having his chance.'

'I will not have Curly brought into it at all,' said Pollock. 'Curly has done things which hundreds of other men have done. But Curly is a good man. He's going to be a success. He is essentially a moral man, and a decent man. I would go into partnership with him, or let him marry my sister, or anything. But Bobby has done at twenty-one what he would have been ashamed to do at nineteen. He is going down hill, and essentially he is a bad man and a rotten character. Extraneous circumstances have really nothing to do with it. He is decaying from within. Nothing can stop him, and I'm not going to tell lies to that old man and compromise that girl's future in a cause that is perfectly futile.'

Keddy's numbness grew more pronounced. He felt that it was getting the better of him, that it would cause something to happen, though he did not know what. He gulped at his whisky and lit another pipe.

'Arthur,' he said presently, 'the reason why I'm asking you to do this is because we've known each other so long, and we've always got on so well. And this—well, it matters to me—it matters like the devil.'

The appeal was at least well directed, and Pollock winced. He said that if it had been for Keddy himself he would have lied till all was blue. Let Keddy believe that, he pleaded. But, oh—Bobby!

'Do think, do think! Think of what you've told me to-night. He asks us to help him in this business after behaving in the way he has! Heaven preserve us! It's simply impudent. The regular hackneyed trick of the lowest cad who deals in women! And now we are to save him by telling a bundle of damned lies to people who trust us! Do look at it from the point of view of common justice!'

'That's what I won't do,' said the small and vivid part of Keddy's mind that was not lost in numbness. 'My point of view is common-sense. Oh, damn it! and common decency.'

Besides, as he pointed out, no lies need be told. Only let Arthur take the other view of Bobby. Let him see that there were two Bobbies—the man and the beast. There was the real Bobby—the Bobby of Orchard Wilton—whom Arthur himself must respect. And there was the Bobby of Oxford, who only became so by the compulsion of an accident. Oh, Keddy knew it; he knew that at Orchard Wilton Bobby showed his essential nature. Oxford was an accident that need never come again.

‘And you, Arthur—you are bringing up fighting and wars again, and helping the bad Bobby to strangle the good one.’

But Pollock fumed and snorted at arguments like these. Bobby must have what he deserved.

‘And, Keddy, you think enough about Bobby. You might think a little about me. How can I? Don’t you see my position? Oh, I’d give anything to be out of it, and get you out of it, too.’

Keddy, however, responded in no way either to the self-pity or the affection in those words. He stood very still, and chose his phrases with cold exactitude.

‘So—you won’t help Bobby?’

‘No, he’s a blackguard.’

‘And because he’s a blackguard, you’ve no pity for him?’

‘Oh, pity is nonsense! I’ll pity Judas, if you like.’

‘You’ve no pity for him, and so you’re going to ruin him.’

‘I’m certainly not going to help him in this business.’

For a moment Keddy looked down into the glass he held. All of a sudden his numbness seemed to shiver out of him. He thought he had got control of himself and his tongue at last, at that very instant when in fact he lost it.

Yet he waited. There was something that wanted to happen in his mind before he spoke. It was a gathering of pictures, those pictures which were Keddy’s means of thought. How they wrecked Bobby’s room, how the bloods cut him, how he took to the joyless pleasures of Miss Oakes, how they taunted him after the eights’ week



collision, and the scene he made, how Colquhoun hunted him, how Wytham was his vengeance, how he plunged at any baseness in answer to their challenge. All these rolled in together and were one idea.

'Oh, the old story!—the old story!' he burst out. 'I see it all now. It is crush, punish, trample, no matter what happens. First it's Porker, then it's you. You jump on Bobby, kick him till he kicks you back, curse him for daring to do it, call the others and knock him down, roll him in the mud, and when he tries to get up you knock him down again, and tell him he deserves it. How *dare* you say he deserves it? What has he done to *you*? Who gave you the right to ruin him? Oh, I'd rather be a navvy and cut my wife's throat in a temper than stand there and send a fellow to hell on a theory.'

Pollock was never so calm as when other people were excited. Perhaps, as he watched Keddy then, there was no request he would have refused him but this one that went against a violent and hardened prejudice.

'You've lost your head,' he said. 'When you think it over you'll see that I can't do it. There's no reason why I should, and several reasons why I shouldn't. Bobby must take the consequences of what he has done, and then we'll try to help him again. Look here, Keddy, it's stupid of you to be angry.'

There were ten years of friendship behind them, a friendship that had made the softest place in Pollock's heart.

'I *am* angry,' said Keddy. 'I have never been so angry in my life. You make me hate you.'

He stood with his hands in his pockets, dead still, and glared at Pollock.

'Look here—let's talk it over again,' Pollock began. 'If you will only think——'

'I am thinking. It puzzles me. I haven't got it clear. You are doing the most sickening, disgusting thing I ever heard of. Oh, I hated Wytham! That was dirty and beastly enough. But you make me feel worse than Wytham, Arthur. Oh, it's fearful! When I think! Good God!'

And again a blinding picture swept across his vision. The whole of the past month snapped up against his mind, from the beginning until now, released like a piece of elastic. He saw Bobby strolling at his side through the woods, heard his lazy laugh, felt his arm linked in his, tasted the sweetness and promise of all those days. And here was Arthur's thin face, looking gentle and reluctant! While Bobby was at home and waiting! The Oakes woman was to be let loose on him, to tear and trample him, to get him down, with all of them against him, with his grandfather to turn him adrift and Porker to give evidence against him, and enemies to grin and jeer and the Oakes woman to triumph and ruin him! And he had been in good spirits, sanguine and vital, trusting to Keddy to save him!

The thing became a blur across his eyes, a tightening in his throat, and there might have happened, had he tried to speak, what would have shaken the rock of Pollock's resolution. But it passed, and anger took its place.

'Oh, what right have you got?' he burst out again. 'Don't you see your theory may be wrong? You've got an opinion—an opinion—and on the strength of that you're going to pass judgment on another fellow, damn it, as if you were God! Who made your opinions good enough to hang a man without giving him another chance? What right have you got to pass judgment? Judgment! Punishment! Because you say he deserves it. You—you Pharisee!'

He hit on that word in his anger, and from it his anger started afresh. Pollock came and put his hands on his shoulders, but he moved back.

'What have you ever done, all you people, but kill, kill, kill?' he asked. 'You treat him as a *case*; you condemn him on a scientific principle, because he breaks your beastly laws. He might be a statue or a mummy for all you care! He doesn't pass the test, so out he goes, though he's flesh and blood, and a fellow you were at school with—and my friend.'

'Keddy, Keddy, do be patient! Bobby must have his licking, and then we'll help him.'

But Keddy saw red. He saw them tying Bobby down, vitality, hot affection, and all that he liked best, while Arthur could save him and would not.

'You've got him down, you and Oakes and Porker,' he said. 'The Oakes woman has the excuse of vengeance, I suppose, and it's not so bad in her. And Porker's a fool. One has to forgive Porker. But you—you know better—you do it just because you're honourable and righteous and a damned Pharisee. And I can't stop you! Oh God! I shall never be able to look at you again without being furious. Why can't you go for him with your fists, like Curly? D'you think Curly would do what you're doing? Those fellows in college were simply stupid and thoughtless. But you—oh, I'm going.'

He looked round for his coat, but it was in the house.

'Don't be a fool, Keddy,' said Pollock. 'You're not going like this——'

'I'm going,' said Keddy, with a straight look that was not pleasant to receive.

'Because I won't stay in the house with a man who turns my stomach. Good-bye.'

He went out, and Pollock followed him as he walked up the narrow path of the cottage garden. The front door was open, and Keddy walked in. He took up his coat and cap, and faced Pollock in the doorway.

'Keddy—won't you——'

'No, I won't,' said Keddy, who relented not even so far as to loosen his anger into sulkiness, not even when Pollock would have pleaded, not even when he touched him. He brushed past, and the garden-gate clicked behind him. He was hot, stifled. He stuffed his cap into his coat pocket, and flung that garment round his shoulders like a stole. He dug his hands in his pockets, and strode on fast and faster. He was bitterly, poignantly unhappy. And he hurried, with a pressing haste that made him count the landmarks even in the wretched confusion of his thoughts. He hurried because of a new instinct which had come to him, which had done as much as his anger to make him leave Arthur Pollock so abruptly. It was a pitiable, stupid, unreasonable instinct. It was

a feeling that, if he could not save Bobby, he could at least be near him.

The night was warm, and made cheery by the waning half of that moon which had shone so brightly when he and Bobby sat on the garden wall the other day. But he went into a tunnel of trees, and when he came out the moon had gone behind a cloud. He was glad. He liked it to be dark. He liked the feeling that he might knock his head against a hanging bough, or run his eye into a straying bramble. The fragment of adventure consoled him. He met a tramp, and would have welcomed a challenge for his watch, or an attack. But the tramp passed, and the trouble remained.

His whole conception of the thing was horribly physical. It was Bobby down, Bobby with his enemies upon him, hurt and disfigured, with the Oakes woman gloating and Porker triumphant. Then he hurried the more, driven by that stupid instinct.

So he came to the gate where his way lay across the park, and the clock from the village church struck twelve. The moon came out, and over in front the side of the house appeared, with its big gables, and its tall chimneys. But Keddy would not look at it. What good was it? It had not protected Bobby from his enemies, who came to drag him out and torture him.

Through the little iron gate he reached the lawn where the lion fountains played and the wall was good to sit upon. He went up the broad stone steps beneath the coat of arms. He let himself in at the heavy door, turned round and shut and bolted it. How absurd was that! But it was a thing which brought him a grain of satisfaction as he did it.

One small oil-lamp shed a dim light through the hall. Bobby was not there. Keddy took the lamp and looked in the billiard-room. It was dark and empty. Again he crossed the hall, and went down the stone passage to the smaller room which he and Bobby used.

And there was Bobby—Bobby and the smell of a small wood fire by which he was sitting, with the lamp beside him and a book thrown down on the floor. It was the

fourth day of his anxiety, but anxiety made no lines on Bobby's face. Only his eyes looked very light and bright below his dark hair, and there were plenty of sparks to come out had you touched him.

Keddy had no notion of breaking bad news, or of doing anything but blurting it. But he found that the first thing he said was very tame.

'Oh, I looked for you in the billiard-room, and you weren't there.'

He put down the lamp, and threw his coat on a chair. He discovered suddenly that he did not at all want to tell his news. Bobby got up, and first of all received the impression that Keddy was a good deal excited, tired, and rather drunk.

'Have a drink,' he said.

Keddy looked down at the whisky on the table, looked long, looked hard, and found no help in it. He raised his eyes to Bobby's, which were waiting for him in that cool, polite way. They were like old days of trouble, and not like Orchard Wilton.

'It's no good, Bobby. We're done. I couldn't move him an inch.'

When Keddy had said to Pollock that on his decision Bobby's fate depended, he had not expressed himself too strongly. Sir Francis Wilton was leaning entirely on what the grave-faced Pollock should tell him. On the action of Sir Francis everything depended. If the light of the old man's countenance were turned away from his grandson, there was an end of Orchard Wilton, an end of the life at Oxford, and the boy was left naked to the vengeance of Miss Oakes. He and Keddy looked at each other, and knew that the thing had happened.

'He's going to give me away?'

'Everything but what I told him to-night,' said Keddy slowly. 'He's going to say what he thinks, that you're a bad lot, that you've lived a bad life, that you're low and past saving.'

Keddy swung round and glared at the fire. He heard Bobby walk slowly to the window, turn, and walk back. He wanted badly to do or say something, not to pity, not

to sympathize, not to curse the past or gild the future with hope. He merely wanted to show Bobby that he would stick to him, and it was just this that there was no way of expressing.

'They've got me this time,' said Bobby softly.

Keddy turned on him almost with a challenge.

'I did try,' he said.

'Arthur, Porker, Gertrude, those fellows in the college,' Bobby murmured. 'Great Scott! they've done it now!'

A reckless man need not be a man insensible of pain. Bobby walked to the window once more, paused, and returned. Keddy shoved his foot about the mat, and watched it. He was growing sulky. And before he knew what he was doing he had broken the silence with a remark that seemed absurd.

'Bobby, all this month has been—it's been awfully jolly.'

What happened then was simply ludicrous, so ludicrous that Keddy jerked out a strangled laugh. For just when he would have given anything for the power of comforting Bobby, here was Bobby comforting him.

'Poor old Keddy!' he said.

His fingers closed on the skin of Keddy's throat, and actually he was smiling. So Keddy laughed a laugh that might as well have been a sob. It was so absurd!

In the silent serenity of the smoking-room, with its ordered rows of books, its massive, thick-legged writing-table, its stately oak and damask chairs, its towering plaster fireplace—there was not much resemblance to the confused desolation of Bobby's room at Oxford last February when they wrecked it. Yet on stages so unlike the same parts were played. Here was Keddy, embarrassed, wretched, ineffective. Here was Bobby, too, who neither now, nor at Oxford, nor ever in the past had enjoyed the cold outcome of hot lawlessness. But there were rules that he must follow—very stern ones—both at Oxford and here. Thus it was characteristic of him that he spoke no abuse of Arthur Pollock, no more than of Curly and company before. Also, in each case, allowing for the change of acquaintance into friendship,

Keddy found that his heavy embarrassment was lightened.

Bobby splashed some whisky into a glass, and added the stuff from the syphon with a dramatic splutter.

‘Have a drink,’ he said to Keddy. ‘I want you to.’

Keddy obeyed, and Bobby lit a cigarette. It was the same ritual as had marked lightening of the atmosphere in the wrecked room long ago. Bobby was faithful to the laws he set himself.

‘What an ass Arthur is!’ he said. ‘He doesn’t understand things a bit. Now, if it had been Carpenter, I believe——’

‘Carpenter hits,’ said Keddy. ‘He never knifes.’

At the venom in that last word Bobby laughed.

‘Poor old Keddy! Have you been giving Arthur all the best Keddyesque cold sarcasm? Or did you fling the glasses at him? Or were you proud and haughty?’

‘Oh, I just came away,’ said Keddy, and Bobby surveyed him again with stimulating amusement.

It was a pity that Keddy could not quite rise to this level of buoyancy. He had been too hard hit. As soon as Bobby released his pressure, he fell back into gloom and melancholy staring.

Again Bobby walked to the window. He turned. His phase of gaiety had passed.

‘It’s all very well,’ he said quietly, ‘but they haven’t quite finished with me yet.’

Keddy looked up quickly.

‘First,’ said Bobby, with perfect coolness, ‘my grandfather can’t turn me out of this house for longer than his own rotten life. Not unless he means to cut off the land from the damned baronetcy. Second, Oxford! He can stop the funds and take me down, and Oxford’s not a place I shall shed many tears at leaving. Third, Mary! Who cares for her? Let her marry Arthur. Fourth, Gertrude! She has my promise to marry her. She has her right to damages. Let her go into court and prove it!’

Thus again did Bobby keep the rules that had guided him through life, and his head went higher.

'She has no letters. Thank the Lord! when I wrote to her that night I never mentioned marriage. There's nothing but what I said in that cottage. There's Porker; but he can't prove I wasn't ragging him. Let him come into court and hear about that telegram. Then there's Gertrude. Let her put her oath against mine! If they want a fight, they can have one. They think I'll throw up the sponge, damn them! they always did. But I'll fight till I'm blind. I'll lie like hell. They want war, and they shall get it. They can hit me, and I can hit back.'

Had not Keddy said so?

He looked at Bobby and saw what was happening. He looked at the room around him, which was full of the ghosts of the past month. He tried to wrench comfort from the familiar friendliness of the place where there had been slackness and good times and no war.

'Oh, damn Arthur!' he said, back again in the full flood of sulkiness.

'Yes, let her go into court,' said Bobby. 'She can stick up her oath against mine. Who's going to believe a woman like that? Think of them cross-examining her! Let her put her beastly money into the expenses of an action, and her father's, too. By God! she'll lose it. And then Arthur can buy her an annuity to keep her off the streets. They think they've done me! They think I'll sit and howl like a cur and let them kick me. I'll stick at nothing. I'll have their blood.'

A brilliant thought struck Keddy.

'Look here, can't we stop your grandfather going to Arthur? Can't we turn him on to someone else? Oh, would it be any good sending for Carpenter? He'd come—he'd come like a shot.'

But Bobby never took kindly to suggestions of evasion and retreat. He only noticed Keddy's idea to condemn it as impossible.

'There's Delville,' he said. 'He'll come into court. He'll swear like blue hell. He'll smash her character. We'll make him say she tried on the same game with him. Perjury won't have many terrors for Delville.'



Why, man alive, her whole case will depend on my not trying to defend myself. Suppose she gets Porker to help. Suppose Porker gives away all I said in that room. I'll deny every bally word they say. Gertrude and Porker on one side—there's no one else—and on the other side my oath and yours !'

An unprecedented sulkiness settled on Keddy's face.

'Gertrude and Porker—you and me,' said Bobby, weighing his words.

'Yes,' he said, in lower, more thoughtful tones. For he had looked at Keddy and seen that degree of sulkiness which would have pierced the eyes of the blind.

He kicked the logs in the fire. He muttered 'Damn !' He threw away his cigarette. He put his hand on Keddy's shoulder.

'Come on,' he said. 'Let's go to bed.'

## CHAPTER XVI

### FOR THOSE IN PERIL

ACTIONS for breach of promise of marriage are among the things that 'do not happen' at Oxford. This one in particular would never have happened had not Sir Francis Wilton been so just a man, and his grandson so iniquitous a boy, that first one and then the other of them refused to take those steps which would have satisfied the plaintiff, released the defendant, and silenced the tongues of mankind. They would not pay up. Sir Francis Wilton had no desire to be harsh. As for exercising his power in the matter of the succession, transferring the estates to his second son, and cutting off the land from the baronetcy, he would have died sooner—died and been damned. But, as he wrote to Mrs. Wilton in London, he had no intention of helping Bobby to evade his punishment. Nor did he propose to waste his money on enabling the boy to live in sin at Oxford. That must cease—that and the horses and the life of the young squire. There were a few thousand pounds of Bobby's own with which he could pay for his wicked follies in the past. Then a place should be found for him on an office-stool, and he should eat the bread of repentance till it pleased God to call him to his life's work as master of Orchard Wilton. Was it not his one chance of reformation?

So Bobby was in London with his mother in lodgings. He went to the lawyers; he went to the Jews. But the Jews could do little with a succession that lay, as between Bobby and his uncle, at the mercy of Sir Francis. Also,

the worldly wisdom of his mother, Mr. Carpenter, and Captain Forth was brought to bear against any dramatic imprudences. He accepted the office-stool, and reflected daily on Sir Francis's six-and-seventy years. But if the Jews failed him the lawyers did not. A passion for the lawyers burned in Bobby's heart. He would fight, fight, fight, while there remained a penny to fight with. Sir Francis heard of his intentions. Let him have his way, he said ; let him go to law, and let him bite the dust, and God grant that the chastisement of shame may make him a better and a humbler man to sit in the seat of his fathers.

'He's so stupid,' said Keddy to Mr. Carpenter. 'He has four thousand pounds which somebody left him. His grandfather can't live more than a year or two, so he might pay Miss Oakes her two thousand and still have two thousand left to use up while he's in London. That would have made him comfortable enough. He could have had a horse, and gone about, and done all sorts of things. But, no, he's going to risk losing I don't know how much by going to law. That's Bobby all over.'

It was the beginning of the October term, and this which Keddy said to Mr. Carpenter was being said by many others as well as by him. Actions for breach of promise, as has been said, are things which no one at Oxford has a right to expect. They are an offence against the law of the commonplace. But even in Oxford such things will happen now and then, and the rule of universal commonplace is not one that stands the test of experience. In one way and another Oxford is much more improbable than it looks.

Though Bobby was removed, his sensational affairs were well brought home to the place that knew him no more. Any day in the porch of his college you could meet Colquhoun and hear him announcing that he did not wish to talk any more about that infernal trial.

'They're going to put you in the box, aren't they, Porker ?' men would say to him.

'Yes ; if Master Wilton wants plain answers to plain

questions, I'm his man. A jolly good thing it is there'll be someone there to stick up for the college. We shall want some whitewashing after the papers find out that that young gentleman was educated here. Called by the girl? Yes, I'm called by the girl all right. Not that I care two straws which side calls me. I'm there to have my say, and I'm jolly well going to tell both sides what I think of them.'

Then there was Curly Edwards at the club, scratching his fair head.

'What the devil do they want *me* for?' he said. 'I never had anything to do with Bobby's women. But a fellow came the other day and asked me a lot of questions about things Porker had said, and scribbled down everything I told him as if it had been the words of the prophet.'

Or wandering Tathamites out for their long walks might be heard discussing it. For Tatham, too, had been visited by Bobby's active lawyers, had been questioned, asked to sign a paper, and told that he would be called as a witness. Great was the sensation among the Tathamites. Dearly would they have liked to know how Tatham was connected with this scandal in high life. But it was Tatham's clever way to tell them enough to rouse excitement, and no more.

Another man well primed with gossip was Joseph Delville. The whole affair touched Delville's sense of humour intimately. When serious, he would declare that the woman's claim was nothing less than impertinent. She had not a leg to stand on. Several times the little lawyer's clerks, once Bobby himself, came down to Oxford to see Delville.

So the affair was discussed by the various sections of society, with laughter and with indignation, with awe and with contempt, and the memory of Bobby was kept green because the day of his battle drew near.

One man at least was aggressively uninterested in the matter. That was Pollock. His friends became aware that it did not conduce to his comfort that the case of Oakes and Wilton should be mentioned in his presence.

He had only one relevant opinion to express, an agitated thankfulness that neither side had sent their lawyers down to bother *him*. For the rest, he shuddered and was cross.

The term was some three weeks old when he went to have tea with Mr. Carpenter. They had not met since the night of woe in June, and Mr. Carpenter now signalized the happy event by using his Christian name. This Pollock survived without great difficulty. What was much harder to bear was that the first thing he saw in the room was one of those schoolboy photographs of Bobby—the only ones to be had—propped up in the middle of Mr. Carpenter's mantelpiece. Mr. Carpenter laid a hand on his knee when he saw him shying at the thing for the third or fourth time.

'Are we throwing the first stone, Arthur?' he said. 'No; it's not for us to do that.'

'You—er—Mr. Carpenter—you got him a place in the city, didn't you?' Pollock asked rather hurriedly.

Mr. Carpenter explained. Malcolm had written that the grandfather wished to send him to the city. So Mr. Carpenter intervened, obtained a berth in the office of his brother, an India merchant, where now for some weeks he had been doing very well.

Then of the action. Sir Francis Wilton was quite right, said Pollock, to take him away from Oxford. But it was a perfect scandal that the old man had not paid up to Miss Oakes and saved them all from the disgrace of a public trial! Do think! Oh, heavens! The half-penny papers! The vulgarity! And the whole of Oxford buzzing with excitement. In his presence at least, said Pollock, they had stopped talking of it.

Mr. Carpenter rapidly finished his piece of bread-and-butter. He became very grave.

'Are they calling on you to give evidence?' he asked sharply.

Pollock nearly screamed. No; that situation at least he had escaped.

'Then you are more fortunate than me,' said the clergyman. 'I do not pretend to understand these

things, Arthur, but they attach importance to the fact that Colquhoun was looking out of the window of the inn that afternoon, and that he came to the cottage. They are calling me to give evidence about that.'

'Then I am sorry for you,' said Pollock. 'So far as I can see, Wilton's defence will be nothing but a tissue of impudent lies. He *did* promise to marry the creature, and Porker and Keddy both heard him. There is nothing for him but to lie through thick and thin.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Carpenter reflectively.

He brushed the crumbs from his cassock, got up, paced the room for a moment in silence.

'Do you see much of Malcolm this term?' he asked suddenly.

Pollock thought he might have spared him that question. His face twitched unpleasantly.

'Oh, we are on speaking terms,' he said. 'We are faultlessly civil. It seems to me that he spends all his time in Curly Edwards' digs.'

'Ah! I asked you because I have seen very little of him myself. It is curious, Arthur—it is curious. Because after the trouble of last term he wrote me some letters that pleased me very much. This term I have scarcely seen him. I thought you might be able to give me news of him.'

He had come to the wrong quarter, said Pollock bitterly. The fact was, Keddy and he had quarrelled. Their views about Bobby were incompatible. They needn't go into that story. But Keddy had got Bobby on the brain. He was infatuated, unmanageable, deaf to reason—yes, and to the appeal of old friendship, too.

'So you have not discussed the trial with him?' Mr. Carpenter asked.

No. Why should he? What was the good? Pollock threw a match viciously into the fire.

'Oh,' he said bitterly, 'it's all very splendid and fine, Mr. Carpenter, when you have two fellows sticking together through thick and thin. It's all very splendid in theory. But I tell you in real life it means red ruin. It's a sin against common-sense, and the punishment will

come. Oh, I know what you're thinking about, and I tell you Keddy would sell his immortal soul for that blackguard as soon as give him a cigarette.'

So Pollock went away and left those words behind him. And Mr. Carpenter stayed long in his room, pacing about in his cassock, while the autumn twilight grew to darkness. The deep lines gathered on his face, hot words burst from his lips. He folded his arms ; he clasped his hands behind him. And the storm raged within him.

There was danger, peril, terror. The words of Pollock stuck and rankled in his head. He turned on the light, and once more read those two satisfactory letters of Keddy's from London and from Orchard Wilton. They were short, but their ring of sincerity had warmed Mr. Carpenter's heart. The boy was repentent ; he was sorry ; he had suffered ; he admitted his offence, and had made his peace. And then in the second letter—Bobby ! Was not the whole case in those letters ? Mr. Carpenter's mind went back to the evening a year ago when he sat in the billiard-room at Keddy's home and strained his poor skill to arm the innocent boy against the dangers before him. Ah ! he remembered it. The easy-living boy, his virtuous instincts, his pleasure in good, and his fearful defencelessness against the wiles of Satan ! Here they were, all in these two letters. The good intentions were here, the pure instincts, even the love of the Lord—and Bobby ! Now, who had been right—Mr. Carpenter or those who mocked him for pointing out the dangers ? There on the mantelpiece was the photograph of Bobby, a dare-devil schoolboy polished with soft living. And the claims of that boy stood in conflict with the claims of Christ. Poor Malcolm ! With horrible distinctness Mr. Carpenter saw the precipice they were approaching. The law-court, the wavering jury, the pride of Bobby and his small fortune at stake, Malcolm in the witness-box with the memory of the fatal promise of marriage seared on his mind. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—so help you God ! Then the conflict would be on him. Would he convict

his friend of perjury and help in his undoing ? or would the claims of Bobby override the claims that should stand higher ?

The sweat broke out on Mr. Carpenter's face. The waters of calamity boiled round him. 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.'

He sat down at his table, native courage stirring him at last. He wrote a note to summon Keddy to dinner that night, and sent it off by the messenger post haste.

It worked. At the cheerful board of St. Saviour's House Keddy dined that night. He told the story of the geese which Bobby shut up in the tunnel, and when they had paid the full tribute of hilarity he announced that for his part he thought it was a very cruel thing to do. The pleasure of teasing was one that did not grow less keen as Keddy grew older. Mr. Carpenter pinched his arm for it as they went upstairs.

But, as Keddy said with a sigh, one must have some amusement in these beastly November days.

Was Keddy growing *blasé*? He lit his pipe in Mr. Carpenter's room, and made himself comfortable as of old in the big chair. He varied between sadness and that same teasing humour. He spoke affectionately of Curly Edwards. He did not know what he would do when Curly went down next year.

And had he news of Bobby ?

No ; Keddy was not *blasé*. He was only sad and disappointed.

'I'll tell you what it is about Bobby,' he said. 'I'm absolutely a professor of Bobby now ; I know him in and out. He's like a piece of litmus paper. If you stick him in acid he goes red, and blue in the other stuff, you know. If you treat him well and like him, he's simply splendid ; and if you bully him, he's simply horrid. All this law business is simply sickening. Bobby is getting hard and hostile again, just like the worst parts of last term.'

'Malcolm dear, can we wonder ?' said Mr. Carpenter gently. 'Can we be surprised at his being hard, when we think what he is going to do ? Poor Bobby, poor



Bobby! This afternoon I was talking to Arthur, and Arthur is afraid that if Bobby really means to defend this case, he will be tempted, Malcolm, tempted to do what will be terrible—terrible!

‘You mean,’ said Keddy slowly, ‘that he will tell a lot of lies.’

Mr. Carpenter bent forward and took Keddy’s hand.

‘Dear old boy, I want you to know how much I sympathize. I know, I know, what a great deal of good you have done for Bobby, especially lately. And it must be terrible for you to see him in his difficulties and know that you cannot help him. It is terrible to think that the only help you could give would be a deadly sin.’

Thus Mr. Carpenter drew a bow at a venture.

‘I know,’ he added in the heavy silence that followed—‘I know how you will feel this, because we know you have already sinned for Bobby’s sake, don’t we? and repented, and been forgiven.’

Keddy withdrew his hand. That thick sulkiness overspread his face again. He kicked a stray bit of coal towards the fender.

‘Oh, there’s one solitary sin I’ve never committed,’ he said irritably—‘at least, never except just for a minute. I’ve never left Bobby in the lurch.’

The sweat broke out on Mr. Carpenter’s forehead. He controlled himself.

‘Malcolm dear——’

But Keddy swung round on him with solemn eyes and stubborn mouth.

‘Mr. Carpenter, I haven’t got anything to say to you. It’s no good our talking. I don’t know about it, and I won’t talk about it—I won’t.’

Mr. Carpenter received the words and the look and the message of defiance. He was silent. There was nothing for him now to do but to pray for those in peril.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE BATTLE AND THE WOUNDS

A SMALL man in a worn silk gown and wig awry shot round the corner into the east corridor of the Law Courts. He was a thick-necked, bullet-headed man ; short white hair showed underneath his wig. He looked frosty and keen, more in tune with the crisp December air outside than with the atmosphere of hot pipes in here. He shot round the corner, hands in pockets, beaming with cheerful hurry. He saw a well-dressed youth wandering vaguely up the corridor. He stopped with a jerk as he met him.

'Are you one of my Oxford friends ? No ? Yes ? Then, where's my boy ? Where's Wilton ? 'Pon my soul and honour, I think the place is asleep. Where's my clerk ? Have they gone to the consultation-room ? Don't know ? Are they all mooning about in Pretty's court ? Why the devil don't they do as I tell them ? I've been in the Court of Appeal all the morning, and they may send for me back any minute. How are things going in Pretty's court ? Don't know ? What the devil——'

Keddy let the little man sweep him off along the corridor. He had been down to send a telegram for Bobby, and had lost his way. He was glad to be taken in tow, and he found that he liked this breezy little elderly gentleman on whom so much depended.

'Mr. Grove, sir—Mr. Grove,' a voice panted from behind. The little barrister swept round. A harassed-looking, bearded man was in pursuit.

‘Jeffson—where in the world—’pon my soul—where have they got to?’

‘They’re coming, sir,’ the clerk answered quickly. ‘Mr. Hastings-Smith took them round to the other side. This room was engaged.’

And here they were, plenty of them, Keddy thought, as they hurried down the echoing stone corridor. Mr. Hastings-Smith, the junior counsel, led the way. Then Lane the solicitor, whom Keddy knew, and his clerk, and Bobby and Curly and Delville. It was funny to see Curly and Delville side by side. Mr. Hastings-Smith was a heavy fair man with spectacles; Keddy did not much care for him. Mr. Lane was small and dark and ferrety; the less said about Mr. Lane the better. Neither of them was nearly so nice as Mr. Grove, who gave you such a feeling of confidence and hopefulness amid these slightly awe-inspiring surroundings.

He shook hands with Bobby in his brisk way.

‘Morning, Mr. Wilton. Well, this is a pretty vixen you’ve struck this time! Now you’re going before a judge who’s a man of the world, Mr. Wilton. We want a straight story told in a straight way, as I said to you the other day. Tell your story straight out, and you’ll find Pretty will do his best for you. Now we’ve a few minutes for another consultation.’

‘No chance of coming on in Pretty’s court to-day,’ Mr. Hastings-Smith put in. ‘That case is good for another three hours.’

‘Oh, you never can tell,’ said Mr. Grove briskly. ‘Well, Mr. Wilton, you’re lucky in your judge. Mr. Lane—where’s Mr. Lane? Jeffson, is that room ready? Mr. Lane, what the devil do you mean by all this nonsense in the brief? Here, Jeffson, give me the brief. Oh, clumsy, clumsy! Here, Mr. Lane, who’s to make head or tale of this stuff? See, I put a blue pencil through these three sheets; they’re nonsense. There, Wytham—where’s Wytham? How far from Oxford? Not a word to tell me—not a word, not a single word! How am I to know? What am I to do with a brief like this? Four miles? Oh, be quiet, and let Mr. Wilton

‘speak. Four miles? There, thank you. Now, why wasn’t that in the brief, Mr. Lane? Now I know. And what’s all this fuss about Forth? Who’s Forth? Where is he? Why haven’t I got his proof? ’Pon my word! What? Where the devil is he, then? What does it all mean? Why can’t I have plain answers to plain questions? What, the room ready? Come along, then, you and you and you and you.’

Mr. Grove gave the lead and shouldered his way into the consultation-room. Curly and Keddy were left alone.

‘I say, that man’s a holy terror,’ said the former, looking at the shut door of the consultation-room with a fine superiority on his pleasant fair face.

‘Oh, he’s rather jolly,’ said Keddy. ‘He’s like Bobby, full of spunk, only it shows more. By Jove! I expect they’re all catching it in there.’

‘He’s a dead cert. for Lord Chief Justice of England one of these days, I should think,’ said Curly.

They sat down on an oak bench let into the stone wall, and looked up and down the long corridor, Oxford in the Law Courts, armed at all points with the magnificent well-bred contempt that Oxford has for any form of specialization. Here, indeed, was a very temple of specialization. Barristers in their robes, solicitors with bags, clerks with briefs and books, hurried up and down the corridor, into courts and out, round corners, up and down the big round staircase.

‘It’s quarter to one,’ said Curly, yawning. ‘I’m hungry.’

‘Let’s go and have something to eat,’ Keddy suggested eagerly. ‘There’s a kind of bar round there.’

There was no form of diversion that Keddy had not welcomed vigorously that morning. But Curly thought they ought to stay where they were. So they stayed, and Keddy tied the fingers of his glove into knots. It was waiting that Keddy could not stand. It was all right when Mr. Grove was peppering round at everyone and making a cheerful stir; and it was all right when Bobby was telling him how Mr. Justice Pretty seemed a sportsman, though the jury were rather swine. That

kept things going. But to wait with nothing to do—Keddy could not stand that.

Luckily it was not many minutes before Bobby came out, Bobby looking rather stiff and defiant, with his eyes very light and his hair very dark. He sent Keddy off to find Tatham, who was believed to be eating a bun somewhere, and Curly he summoned into the consultation-room.

Keddy went off down the corridor, wondering at the strange people he passed, wondering, also, at the way they seemed to take him for granted. Personally, he felt a frightful outsider, as if he were wandering uninvited about another man's house. But he was glad to be employed.

Round the corner at the end he turned to the right, and found Tatham with his bun at the bar a little way further on. Tatham in the Law Courts seemed perfectly at home. Judges and King's counsel assumed the proportions of Tathamites in the twinkling of an eye. He had their measure. They lied, of course, and were paid to lie, but what was that to Tatham? They were not of his fold. Nevertheless, with a perfect mastery of technicalities, he informed Keddy that there was another judge as well as Pretty taking common juries. Their case might be transferred to another court.

He finished his bun and paid for it, and started off for the consultation-room. Keddy was going with him, but something made him look back, and he stopped.

Bearing along, with busy short steps, his long coat wagging from side to side, his hat pushed well to the back of his head, came Mr. Carpenter round from the other corridor, trailing an umbrella from his clasped hands behind him. And even in Mr. Carpenter, as he looked from side to side, you could see traces of contemptuous Oxford.

But at the sight of Keddy the vague worry in his face took shape. His step quickened.

Keddy explained the position of the consultation-room to Tatham, who seemed to know all about it already. Then he turned back and met Mr. Carpenter. And a

passing barrister found time to wonder what might be the relation between the keen glance of the clergyman and the gloomy, hard gaze of the boy awaiting him. Mr. Carpenter took his arm and walked him up and down.

'Dear old boy, you got my note yesterday? Yes? I know you don't like talking about it, but, Malcolm dear, I couldn't bear—I couldn't bear that you should come here to-day without asking to be helped—to be helped, you know. Who knows what one might do when the temptation comes? Ah! And I knew you would do that for me, Malcolm; I knew you wouldn't refuse to ask counsel. It needs but a word, a thought, you know, and there is He by our side, dear old boy, even in a place like this, with the temptations that *must* come. Ah! What strength that gives one in one's weakness!'

But Keddy was terribly irresponsive. He clicked the coins in his pocket. His gaze did not leave the ground.

'I'm—I'm awfully grateful to you about it,' he said painfully, and Mr. Carpenter suffered afresh the tortures of human impotence.

'And, Malcolm dear——'

'Good heavens!' Keddy exclaimed, brisk once more, and they stood still in the place where they were. First a confused noise of footsteps on stone, then, round the corner, the party from the consultation-room came swinging like a fast train at a curve. First Mr. Grove with agitated gown, and Mr. Hastings-Smith, solicitor, clerk, client, Delville, Tatham, Curly, following by ones and twos at such speed as hurry could achieve and dignity allow.

'Good gracious!' said Mr. Carpenter, adjusting his glasses.

'It's Mr. Grove, Bobby's K.C.,' said Keddy. 'I say, I wonder what's up.'

The little man swept past them, streaming rapid, cheery reproofs at Mr. Lane over his shoulder. Quite a long way he had gone before Bobby followed up, and took Keddy's arm with an explanation.

'We're transferred to Sandilands' court,' he said. 'Sickening bad luck, too. Sandilands is a pious devil. We're coming on at once in Court Nine.'

So Keddy and Mr. Carpenter joined the train, and followed round the corner and along the west corridor.

'Next door to the Divorce Court, too,' Curly observed, as they went through the swinging glass doors of Court Nine. 'That's where we should all have been if Bobby had married her.'

No doubt the law is a very majestic thing—when you get near enough. But Keddy's first impression of Court Nine, as he panted and struggled against the wall inside the door and appealed to Curly to lay out a few of the people who were squeezing the breath out of his body, was that they were in the midst of a young riot. It appeared to him that the whole place was in a state of bewildering confusion, and there was something absurdly incongruous about the bored-looking judge, with his head on one side scribbling calmly in a note-book over there above the tumult. What was he writing? Keddy was quite sure that it was just 'Fie, foh, fum,' or some such nonsense, because nobody could write sense with such a tumult down below, and it must need all the judge's powers of application to keep up that Olympian serenity.

As a matter of fact there was a case just ending. Keddy had caught some words like 'Find for the plaintiff' as he came in, and now lots of people were forcing their way out of the glass doors and others were coming in. One man passed him with a woman clinging on his arm, and there was a look on his face that contemptuous Oxford had not bargained for. Was he the man who had lost the case? Was he ruined? Keddy did not ever want to see such a look in a man's face again. It made his throat tighten, made him feel horribly ashamed of something, and he looked high and low to avoid seeming to stare at the man as he went close by—so fearfully close. Then there were words in a clear, confident voice. 'Next case on your lordship's list—parties have come to terms.' That meant there was a case off, no doubt, and that was why they had come here in such a hurry. And then in a line over Mr. Carpenter's bald head, over there below the judge, an official in a wig got up and said, 'Oakes and Wilton.'

'May it please your lordship, gentlemen of the jury, this action is brought by Miss Gertrude Oakes, a lady of independent but moderate means, to recover damages for breach of promise of marriage. The defendant is Mr. Robert Francis Wilton, the grandson and heir of Sir Francis Wilton, of Orchard Wilton, Somerset.'

The words came in reassuring tones from the other side of the court, and as the crowd by the door grew thinner, Keddy could see the man in the stuff gown talking. It was the plaintiff's junior counsel. And they were actually beginning Bobby's case! And it only seemed half a minute since they came in here while the other case was ending. Things must have changed a good deal since Shakespeare complained of the law's delay. Why, it seemed indecent! And up there was the judge, who had not taken the slightest notice of anything at all, still scribbling away in gentle unconcern, only stirring from time to time to shift his head from the right poise to the left poise.

Well, things were settling down, while the man with the honeyed voice was telling the jury all about the Oakes woman. Keddy and Curly spotted two seats in one of the back rows. The rows were higher at the back, like the circle of a theatre, so that you got a good view. They went and sat down, and took stock of the position. Away in the front row Mr. Grove was fussing about with his papers, still whispering scoldings at the harassed Mr. Lane, who sat below him in the well of the court. Bobby was sitting with Delville just behind the crowded row of junior counsel, and Tatham and Mr. Carpenter were further in towards the middle of Bobby's row. Except in the front row, where Mr. Grove and the other leading counsel sat, the seats were packed with people. Indeed, as the nature of the case became known, people crowded in again to the open spaces by the doors, and the place was as full as when Keddy had first come in. With hostile eyes he scanned the people to his left, the other side. Miss Oakes was there, not in white serge now, but neat and quiet as ever, with a white fur boa over a tailor-made dress of dark blue. Her father sat by her,



and wore the very same double-breasted loose check waistcoat. He was very much 'in charge' of the girl, explaining this and that. Where would the Oakes woman be without a protector to put her in character? thought Keddy. He pointed them out to Curly, whose brief comments were more acute than refined. But Curly maintained a cool superiority that almost equalled the judge's, and was quite beyond the power of Keddy in such an exciting scene.

And there—there in a short coat and an aggressively secular waistcoat, towering above the others in the space by the other door, scornful with a scorn that, thank heaven! was not the scorn of Oxford, was Porker Colquhoun.

'Look at him! Isn't he like Brennus in the senate house? My word, how'll he get on with old Grove? Really, he ought to have a placard pinned on him, "This is a parson!" in apologetic sort of writing, you know.'

'Listen, Keddy; we're coming to the point.'

They were. Keddy looked across at the man who was making the speech.

'It was there in that cottage, as Miss Oakes will tell you, gentlemen, that Mr. Wilton made an offer of marriage, which she accepted. This was while they were still alone. There had been some light conversation about the pleasure which the lady and gentleman took in one another's society, and Mr. Wilton said, "Why shouldn't it go on for ever, Gertrude—why shouldn't we marry and stop this underhand intimacy? Will you?" And that offer Miss Oakes accepted.'

'It's a lie, it's a lie!' Keddy whispered—'it is, really. That never happened at all. Why, it's not even the sort of way Bobby would have said it.'

'He'd have said "damned rot," not "underhand intimacy,"' Curly observed.

'He never said anything of the kind,' said Keddy.

Bobby had leant forward, and was whispering to Mr. Hastings-Smith, who duly made a note in his brief. Mr. Grove had marked his scorn of the bold fabrication by jerking his head round to his junior and smiling, which one may hope the jury saw.

'And shortly afterwards, as you will hear,' the plaintiff's counsel was saying, 'they were joined by Mr. Forth, an undergraduate friend of Mr. Wilton's, and by Mr. Colquhoun, whom I have already mentioned. In the presence of these witnesses Mr. Wilton repeated his promise.'

Again Mr. Grove smiled round at his junior and his client. He looked most comfortably confident in the face of these assertions. And one needed it. Keddy did not nudge Curly this time. Bobby did not lean forward to Mr. Hastings-Smith.

It was twenty-five minutes past one before they came to the end of the story of Miss Oakes, of the brutal and insulting letter she received the very next day, of her appeals to Bobby's honour, generosity, chivalry, and the failure of all these. 'Not another word did she ever hear from Mr. Wilton—not another word, and has not to this day. Now, gentlemen, I will call Miss Oakes to tell you her story herself. Miss Oakes!'

At last the judge showed signs of animation. He coughed gently, shifted his head from left to right, as Miss Oakes was making her way out from her seat, and for the first time, as it seemed, raised his eyes to the tedious scene.

'As it is nearly half-past one,' he said, 'we may as well adjourn before the plaintiff goes in the box.'

So he had spotted that the Oakes woman was the plaintiff, Keddy thought. That was clever of him. But, really, he looked most impressive as he walked out of his private door in his scarlet and ermine.

'That means luncheon, at any rate, thank the Lord!' said Curly.

It meant also another crush of people by the door, and Keddy would have waited. But Curly took his broad shoulders down into the crowd, and got through, Keddy following. They waited outside.

'Half an hour,' they heard someone say. 'We must be back in time. This is going to be fun.'

That was from a man to a woman whom he was taking round. Indeed, there was quite a buzz of talk going on out here in the corridor. The 'public,' of course, were

in the gallery above, and did not come this way. But a good many people seemed to be hanging about down here whose interest in the case was quite non-professional. Keddy heard them asking which of the young men was the defendant. When would he go into the box? Whatever could he say to clear himself? Then a young barrister went past rubbing his hands. 'Oh, my word, what a case for Sandilands! How he'll revel!' And from that Keddy turned to do a bit of eavesdropping that may be pardoned in a place so public. It was Mr. Grove talking in low tones to another barrister. 'Oh, we shall see, we shall see,' he was saying. 'I like my boy, but I'm not sure of him—no, not at all. There's something funny. We shall see.'

Colquhoun strode up to Curly, his fists in his pockets looking like two apples.

'Hullo, young fellow m'lad, are you feeling like lunch?' he asked.

But Curly said he was going to lunch with Keddy, and Colquhoun shrugged his shoulders and went on.

Then Mr. Carpenter came out with worried face, and Tatham with him. Then Bobby with Mr. Lane.

Mr. Lane pointed at Keddy. His little black eyes widened.

'Is that Mr. Forth?' he said.

The Bobby of the Law Courts was much more suggestive of Oxford than of Orchard Wilton. He was looking very slim and tight-stretched to-day. He had that old appearance of expecting to be hit, and his hair was brushed to perfection. There was hostility, too—hostility even as he looked at Keddy.

'Yes, that's Forth,' he said coldly, and at once he started off with his clean quick stride after Delville down the corridor. Mr. Lane looked after him, looked at Keddy, seemed to grow smaller, and trotted off after Bobby.

So the others went back to the bar where they had been before, and fed themselves on sandwiches and buns. Mr. Carpenter never said a word; but that may have been because of Curly's presence. Tatham was full of

gossip about Mr. Justice Sandilands. He seemed quite to appreciate the humour of putting up people like Miss Oakes and Bobby to give evidence before the most straight-laced judge on the bench. 'If they can prejudice him against the girl at the first,' he said, 'he's as likely as not to get the idea that Wilton must necessarily be a saint in comparison, and then Wilton will probably win. They're both sinners. It's just a question of which side's sin Sandilands spots first.'

Keddy thought the judge had not yet shown any violent animus against either side. But Tatham knowingly assured him that all that bored superiority was just put on. Let them wait.

Indeed, it was plain how very much would depend on the way Miss Oakes might acquit herself in the box, and well before two o'clock the court was filling up with persons interested in the Oxford case. Keddy got a seat at the end of one of the rows, next to Bobby, and Mr. Hastings-Smith turned round and told them that Mr. Grove was back in the Court of Appeal for a time. Were they going to send for him? Keddy inquired. Bobby mocked him. Why should they send for anyone when here was Mr. Hastings-Smith? Keddy, therefore, had to be embarrassed in deference to the feelings of Mr. Hastings-Smith, but it came, nevertheless, as a shock that there could be another case on hand so important as to keep Mr. Grove from attending to Bobby's interests to-day. The court was a-buzz with talk. There were things to watch, too. A little knot of jurymen were leaning together in their box and following the forefinger of one of their number who was pointing out Miss Oakes. Then the finger turned straight at Keddy—no, at Bobby. There was more nodding of heads in the jury-box. Plaintiff and defendant! Which did they like best? There was not much human sympathy in the way they looked at either, and Keddy realized that he, Bobby, Gertrude, Oxford, were only like headlines and rough sketches in halfpenny evening papers. Thus were the jury regarding them, grateful, perhaps, that the case of the day should be something more interesting

than a dispute between grocers about the quality of some Demerara sugar. But juries were wonderful things ! Surely, to the last hair in the last man's beard this one was identical with that which they had laughed at in Mr. Justice Pretty's court in the morning ! There was the same fat man, the same thin one with pince-nez, the same old one with a grey beard of reverend and rather dispiriting length, and the same socialistic-looking, scraggy, consumptive one who nursed a soft felt hat. Such are juries. On such men it depended whether Bobby had a horse to ride the next few years and whether Mrs. Wilton went about in a hansom cab or an omnibus.

An official in a gown came in through the small door at the back of the bench and said, ' Silence ! '

Silence there was, and everyone rose to his feet. Mr. Justice Sandilands strolled in with his hands in the wide pockets of his scarlet gown, bowed slightly, sat down, and delighted Keddy by starting off at once with his leisurely scribbling.

Then Miss Oakes went into the box.

Of the several varieties of relation between counsel and witness which this case was to illustrate that between Miss Oakes and Mr. Calcroft, her leading counsel, was not the most exciting, but it was the most skilful. From the moment when the plaintiff went into the box, when all parts of the court at once paid the tribute of absolute silence and the reporters' pencils got to work on the outlines of her hat and face, for the whole of the half-hour during which her counsel dealt with her, the conversation was such as might have taken place among friends round a dinner-table. It was wholly free from stiffness or artificiality. Mr. Calcroft, bland and patient, seemed to say nothing but his occasional encouraging ' Yes,' ' Ah ! ' ' And then ? ' Yet Miss Oakes appeared to be only answering in the shortest way the general drift of his inquiries. The story went from beginning to end in perfect chronological order. Miss Oakes was twenty-two years old, had been educated in a convent near Dieppe, lived now with her father at Hampstead, and had met Mr. Delville in the summer of last year.

Mr. Delville was a friend of Mr. Wilton's. It was he who brought Mr. Wilton to see her at Hampstead.

'Where did you first meet Mr. Delville, Miss Oakes?'

This question was interposed by the judge, amid the little stir of interest which judicial interruptions cause. Yet the questioner still scribbled. He had not so much as looked at Miss Oakes yet, nor did he now. He merely raised his eyebrows as he wrote, and spoke in his patient, bored tones.

'Where did you first meet him, Miss Oakes?'

The question had to be repeated, for the witness turned towards him with pretty timid deference and hesitated. She could not remember. Her mouth stayed open, and you could see her eyes looking vaguely up to a corner under the roof where she seemed to keep her recollections.

'I cannot be positive,' she said apologetically. 'I can't recollect at all. It may have been at a friend's house.'

'Had you met many undergraduates then?'

'Oh no; I did not know any at all.'

'Yet you can't remember where you first met this one?'

She was sorry, but she was afraid not. She might remember presently.

'I think,' said Mr. Hastings-Smith from his place in front of Bobby—'I think Mr. Delville will be able to remind her, my lord.'

'All right, all right,' said the judge. 'Go on, Mr. Calcroft.'

So they went on to the whole tale of occasions on which Miss Oakes had met Bobby. To Keddy it seemed that they were treating it at most inordinate length. And delay was caused by reason of the quantity of questions and answers which the judge took down verbatim in his notes. Some letters from Bobby were put in evidence, but they were of no great interest except as showing the growth of intimacy all through last summer term. Indeed, the course of proceedings became a little dull.

They came to the day when Keddy drove her out to inspect the cottage at Wytham.

'And who is Mr. Forth?' the judge asked of the world in general, turning back the pages of his note-book.

'An undergraduate, my lord.'

'Another of this lady's undergraduate friends?'

'I had never met him before that day,' said Miss Oakes quietly.

'Isn't she clever?' Bobby whispered admiringly to Keddy. 'Do you see? She's just as quiet when she's telling the truth as when she's telling lies.'

Quiet she was throughout all. Not a trace of excitement or malice was in her manner. Her only emotion was a natural diffidence now that the painful part of her story approached.

Over that part, too, she was intelligible and clear. She repeated the words that Bobby had never used—'Why shouldn't it go on for ever, Gertrude—why shouldn't we marry and stop this underhand intimacy? Will you?'

'And I said "Yes."'

'You said what?' the judge asked.

'I said "Yes," your lordship.'

'"Yes"? Not a very passionate acceptance, then.'

The witness begged his lordship's pardon. She had not caught his remark.

'I said it was not a very passionate acceptance,' the judge repeated loudly and rather irritably.

'I should never have thought of expressing myself passionately to Mr. Wilton, your lordship.'

The judge lifted his glasses and looked at her at last.

'Bobby, he knows she's lying. He's a clever old devil,' Keddy whispered.

'And then?' said Mr. Calcroft, in his quiet, clear voice.

Keddy and Bobby sat very still, and the next few minutes were not enjoyable. Miss Oakes was back again in a part of her story that was true. Here it was all over again—the room at Wytham, the coming of Keddy, the coming of Colquhoun, vivid to her as to them who watched and listened. The judge was writing every word. The jury were attentive to the point of interest. Mr. Calcroft stood erect and nodded gravely at each of

the telling sentences the witness spoke. He folded his hands behind his gown and checked her when her words came too fast for the judge's unhurried pen.

'Then Mr. Colquhoun began to speak of me in a very unpleasant manner,' she said.

'Will you tell these gentlemen what he called you?'

'Oh,' she murmured, 'I am sure he is sorry for it now.'

'Very likely, Miss Oakes, but you must please tell these gentlemen what he said.'

Thereupon Miss Oakes looked round her for protection and found none. So there came the blush of modesty to her cheeks. She looked down.

'It was more what he said to Mr. Wilton,' she faltered.

'He abused him for being with me. And Mr. Wilton said——'

'Yes, yes,' her counsel put in, all encouragement and sympathy.

'He said, "You are making a mistake. This is Miss Oakes, to whom I am engaged to be married."'

Then Bobby laughed. It was not a loud or aggressive laugh. It was merely a small, irrepressible splutter of amusement at the impudence of the witness's assertions. But people looked, and saw him turn to Keddy, who also laughed a little.

'When Mr. Colquhoun had gone,' said the witness then, 'I asked him if he meant it. He said he did, and always had.'

'And Mr. Forth heard him say so?' she was asked.

'Yes,' she answered.

Was she affected by these sad memories? Truly she looked most unhappy, and it was very indistinctly that she told of her parting from Bobby that night and of the dreadful letter that came next day. The letter had no allusion to the promise of marriage. No; it was addressed as if to a woman of the streets; it was insulting and brutal, and bade her never show her face to Mr. Wilton again. That was the last she heard of him. Her letters were returned, her prayers were unanswered; and here she stood, a woman deserted, slandered, and betrayed.

Mr. Calcroft sat down. The moment was well chosen,



for he left the plaintiff with an encircling halo of pathos and the rays of sympathy converging on her from all parts of the court.

Then Mr. Hastings-Smith got to work on her in the defendant's interest. Little enough he achieved. An interminable list of suggestions were 'put' to her, all of which she sadly and unresentfully denied. That Delville made her acquaintance at the Casino at Dieppe, that she threatened him last April with proceedings for breach of promise, that her conduct with him had been improper—all these assertions she met with her patient denials. That the whole story of Bobby's promise was a fabrication, that she had conspired with Colquhoun to ruin him, that Bobby had merely represented her to Colquhoun as his cousin, these suggestions were repudiated one and all.

'Why does he ask her all these things she's sure to deny?' Keddy complained. Bobby told him it was the way they did things. It was necessary.

'And your conduct with Mr. Wilton, you say, was that of a woman who might fairly expect to marry a baronet's heir?' she was asked.

'Certainly,' she said.

'Do you consider, Miss Oakes, that a respectable woman of your age would let undergraduates visit her in a state of intoxication at two o'clock in the morning?'

It was useless. The whole incident of Angel Square was utterly denied. So was everything, and at last Mr. Hastings-Smith sat down with the air of having achieved every purpose he desired.

What was now the betting on the plaintiff's victory as she left the box? Some men behind Bobby and Keddy were putting it at two to one. Several of the jury had borne her cross-examination with impatience. Mr. Calcroft left the court. It was a quarter past three, and Colquhoun, amid a fresh stirring of interest, stood in the box to corroborate the plaintiff's story. 'Now,' said Bobby, 'we're going to see some fun.'

Then did Mr. Hastings-Smith jot down every word that was said. His quill-pen scabbled on his paper. The

judge became interested, the jury looked respectful. You might have said that the court was cowed by the booming tones of the great deep voice that repeated with the guarantee of a clergyman's oath the crucial points of Miss Oakes's story.

The effect on the judge was obvious. He was like a man at dinner on the arrival of the champagne. He nodded his head at everything Colquhoun said. In his note-book he took it down with gusto. When it went too fast he begged the witness's pardon and spoke to him like a man addressing his equal. And Colquhoun threw out his great chest and told his plain story in his own plain way. It began with his accidental meeting with Miss Oakes and Keddy on that Monday in June when he had chanced to walk to Wytham, and it ended with Bobby's declaration of his engagement. It did not take long to tell. The jury lay back contented. They had heard the rude straight words of unvarnished, disinterested truth.

'Thank you, Mr. Colquhoun,' said the junior who examined him. And as he sat down Mr. Grove came hurrying into the court.

Mr. Hastings-Smith thrust his notes into the leader's hands, whispered something, and Mr. Grove nodded his head energetically.

'Twenty past three,' said Bobby. 'I hope we finish Porker at one sitting. Forty minutes ought to do him.'

'Don't we go on till six?' Keddy whispered.

'Only till four. They stop then.'

Keddy lay back with a sigh of satisfaction. Not to-day would the defendant's witnesses be called, and he could enjoy the passing scene with the freedom of one who lives in the present.

'Just a *few* questions, Mr. Colquhoun,' said Mr. Grove, moderating his breezy tones with the deference due to so triumphant a figure in the box.

Mr. Colquhoun was all at his service, if somewhat contemptuous.

'Had you ever had any reason to be dissatisfied with Mr. Wilton's conduct at Oxford previous to these events?'

Now it was much more exciting listening to Mr. Grove's questions than to Mr. Calcroft's or Mr. Hastings-Smith's. Mr. Calcroft was so quiet in manner that he scarcely seemed to exist at all. Mr. Hastings-Smith relied on a pompous severity which was hardly effective. But Mr. Grove was tingling with life, and was quite the most prominent figure in court. He asked this opening question in a casual sort of way, looking at his papers as if he had not really yet got to work. And he laughed quite boyishly when Colquhoun enlarged on the extent of his dissatisfaction with Bobby.

'Why, of course,' he said suddenly, interrupting a remark about disgracing the college—'of course,' he said, nodding back at Mr. Hastings-Smith as though in acknowledgment of a reminder, 'you told Mr. Edwards that if you could not have Mr. Wilton sent down before the end of the term you would eat your boots. Mr. Edwards is coming here to tell us. Do you remember?'

Ah! they watched Colquhoun, and were satisfied. It had not taken much of Mr. Grove's bantering tone to make him angry. He might have said that, he admitted contemptuously. He did not remember it. Swear? No, he wouldn't swear he hadn't said it.

'Now, that's lucky,' said Mr. Grove, smiling and brisk, 'because Mr. Edwards will swear you did. Well——'

And then began a long list of minute questions about the Monday afternoon when chance took Colquhoun to Wytham. Every action, every minute's occupation, he was asked to describe and account for. The judge put down his pen, unwilling to waste time by taking down questions and answers so trivial. And Colquhoun kept thumping the rail in front of him and hurrying on to the essentials of the story in his fine, frank way.

'Yes, it *was* a warm afternoon,' he said, in answer to one of these absurd questions. 'I arrived at Wytham, where I saw Mr. Forth and Miss Oakes in a dogcart——'

'Yes, yes,' Mr. Grove said eagerly. 'And nothing could have been more unexpected?'

'It *was* unexpected,' said Colquhoun, very straight and fierce.

'It *was* unexpected,' Mr. Grove repeated. 'And where were you when you saw them?'

'In Wytham, of course.'

'Exactly. So we judged. But whereabouts? In the street? On the path? In the road?'

'Pon my word and honour,' the witness burst out in natural indignation, with a glance at the jury, 'what difference can it make whether I was on the path or the road?'

'You must answer the learned counsel's questions,' said the judge apologetically.

'I don't even remember if there was a path,' said the witness.

'But at any rate you were on it if there was one?' Mr. Grove inquired with engaging friendliness.

'I may have been on the road,' Colquhoun yawned out. 'I don't see what it matters.'

Mr. Grove looked up at him and banged his hand on his papers in a way that made you jump.

'It matters, sir, that you should tell the truth,' he snapped.

Everyone awoke at once. The judge put on his glasses. The jury leant forward, and Mr. Carpenter sunk his chin on his hand as if he were ashamed.

'Will you recollect yourself, Mr. Colquhoun?' said the angry counsel. 'Where were you when you saw them?'

'Where were you?' asked the judge with courteous surprise.

Like a man who makes a wholly unimportant concession to a fractious opponent, Mr. Colquhoun recollected that he happened to have gone into the inn for a glass of beer.

'Where you were seen watching from the window by Mr. Carpenter, of St. Saviour's House,' said Mr. Grove, quick and cold as steel. Bobby's elbow was really quite painful in Keddy's side. Oh that the other dons were here to see their tormentor tormented!

'Now, why wouldn't you tell us that before?' counsel asked in a more friendly and expostulating tone. 'Why don't you tell us the truth? Why are you so anxious

to insist that everything happened by accident ? How can we get on with the case unless you will be frank with the jury ? Come, Mr. Colquhoun, *you* ought to know what it means to be on your oath. Come, now, let's get on better in future.'

The judge did a little writing. A good deal of damage had been done to the prestige of Miss Oakes's witness. He looked exceedingly angry.

'I did my duty, and I'm not ashamed of it,' he said.

Mr. Grove took up the word 'duty.' Pleasantly, buoyantly, chaffingly, he asked a string of questions about duty. One's duty to undergraduates, for instance ? To keep them out of mischief ? Of course, of course. To send them down if they are incorrigible ; if you can't succeed in sending them down, then to eat your boots. But there's a duty to save them from evil, is there not ? Mr. Grove was actually sympathetic. He nodded his head pleasantly at the answers he got. If an undergraduate runs into moral danger, one tries to save him. There was perfect agreement on the point.

Things were getting exciting. Mr. Grove had shown his bantering manner, his stern manner, his rude manner, but what he had not yet shown was his wiliness.

'Now, Mr. Colquhoun, we really do want to get to the bottom of this matter. No one denies that you do your duty to your college and the undergraduates. I'm afraid no one denies Mr. Wilton gave you trouble. But I ask you as one who is in charge of the moral welfare of the undergraduates. You suspected Mr. Wilton. Now, why didn't you check him as soon as you saw him running into what you considered danger ? Why did you let things go so far ? Was it right ? Was it proper in one in your position ? Why didn't you interfere much earlier—before this Wytham business ever came to a head ?'

Colquhoun leant his arms on the rail. For some moments past he had seemed anxious to interrupt. You could see a justification written on his face. He was bursting with it. He was appeased by Mr. Grove's reasonable tone. He knew in his heart that Mr. Grove's

complaint could be met with the truth, and explained away, and perhaps he found the truth a consolation and support.

'The name of Miss Oakes conveyed nothing to me,' he said. 'I was bound to investigate. It wouldn't have been right to throw out accusations till I had made sure.'

'The name of Miss Oakes !' Something in those words had an effect on Mr. Grove. His hands were clasped behind his back, in view of the Oxford people, and Keddy saw them begin to rub together. It looked like a dog wagging his tail.

'Oh, oh ! Then Miss Oakes's name meant nothing to you,' he said in tones of innocent interest. 'I see, I see ; you had to investigate. And your investigations took you to Wytham, did they ?'

'They did, and I was not mistaken,' said Colquhoun.

'Mistaken in what, Mr. Colquhoun ?'

But the judge interposed.

'Miss Oakes's name—when did you first hear it ?' he asked.

The pause that followed was the longest on record, and all the time Mr. Grove smiled up at the witness with a look that said, 'Caught, caught !'

'When was it, Mr. Colquhoun ?' the judge asked again.

'I think, my lord,' said Mr. Grove, 'it was on the occasion when her name conveyed nothing to his mind, when he had to investigate, and when his investigations took him to Wytham. Wasn't that the occasion, Mr. Colquhoun ?'

'I don't know what occasion you mean,' the witness answered angrily. He was flustered, however, and Mr. Grove did not fail to see that.

'When you found this telegram in Mr. Wilton's coat pocket,' he said, producing the flimsy bit of paper.

It was a breathless moment—breathless, at least, to those who knew—to Keddy, to Bobby, to Tatham, and beyond question to Colquhoun.

'What telegram ?' he roared.

It was handed up to the judge, who read it to the jury.

‘Arrive Monday eleven o’clock to inspect Wytham.—  
GERTRUDE OAKES.’

The rest was like the extraction of a tooth in fragments, and without an anæsthetic. Colquhoun began by denying all knowledge of the telegram with a vehemence that was extraordinarily unwise. But, said Mr. Grove, if it wasn’t this telegram that put him on the scent of Miss Oakes and Wytham, what was it? What took him to Wytham? When did he hear of Miss Oakes? When was it that her name meant nothing? And let him note the presence of Mr. Tatham in the court, who knew the story of that telegram.

‘You confused me,’ Colquhoun declared. ‘I will tell you the whole story as it happened.’

But no such luck falls to the lot of a witness. The story he told, indeed, but not ‘as it happened.’ He told it as Mr. Grove asked for it—here a bit and there a bit, and the worst of one lie is that all the truth you have spoken rises to convict you. Now they realized the meaning of a hundred small questions Mr. Grove had asked beforehand. Each one seemed to have knocked one brick away from the bridge of Colquhoun’s retreat. Slower and more reluctant his answers came. More and more awkwardly did he fumble with the Testament and shift his arms about the rail. Several times the judge had to tell him in dispassionate tones to answer the learned counsel’s questions.

The learned counsel was perfectly pitiless. He was not severe; the witness needed no more severity. But his face beamed with brisk delight, and no trick was too slight to amuse him. On the subject of the telegram he asked Colquhoun if Tatham had come into college wearing Wilton’s coat.

‘Very likely,’ the battered witness answered.

‘Indeed! Why was it likely?’ Mr. Grove asked, and insisted on the miserable answer that it was not so much ‘likely’ as ‘true.’

So the reporters scribbled for the halfpenny papers which Pollock would read with agony ; and it was the climax of Bobby's fortunes. They gained the point which the defence required. They showed that Colquhoun did not go to Wytham by accident. They showed that he was capable of lying in his evidence. And who will believe any part of the testimony of a liar ?

That was the outcome of Colquhoun's cross-examination, but there was a further outcome. The clock struck four just as Miss Oakes's junior counsel had finished straightening, so to speak, the bent and twisted limbs of the witness in re-examination. The judge rose. The crowd streamed out, licking their chops after the sensation. And presently the little group of Bobby's friends stood on the steps of the Law Courts looking out on to the busy Strand.

Mr. Lane took Bobby away to a consultation in Mr. Grove's chambers.

Curly and Keddy decided to go down the Strand and have tea. Mr. Carpenter was going off in a hansom to a clergy-house in Bethnal Green, where he was staying.

'Good-bye, old boy,' he said, pressing Keddy's arm. 'It is not a pretty sight to see a witness lying, Malcolm, is it ? Not a pretty sight—no, not pretty.'

And he went off to his hansom.

'What was he saying ?' Curly asked, curious at the look on Keddy's face.

'He was talking about Porker,' said Keddy.

Curly laughed.

'Bobby has made a success over Porker,' he said. 'It's touch and go with Bobby now, I should think. It all depends now on what——'

'On how Bobby gets on in the box,' he ended. But that was not what he had meant to say before he saw the sullenness gathering on Keddy's face.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A CHARMED LIFE IN THE ROUT

On the night after the opening of the trial Keddy had a curious dream.

The excitements of the day were likely enough to end in sensational dreams. There was the trial, with its bad and good moments, and the prospect of the morrow which no mental manipulation could possibly twist into anything like a pleasant shape. Then he had succeeded in getting Curly to dine at the Trocadero with him and Bobby, an achievement to be proud of. And all the while he alternated violently between his pleasure at the friendly way in which the two behaved to one another and his annoyance at the numerous things which seemed to have gone wrong in Bobby. No one expected Bobby to speak kindly of Miss Oakes or Colquhoun. But there was a lack of balance about his abuse of them ; there was something coarse, something uneducated, about his gloating over Colquhoun's discomfiture ; there was altogether a malice and bitterness which made Keddy feel reluctantly opposed to him, and kept him perpetually uncomfortable. Then Bobby was enthusiastic about Lane, the horrid little ferret-eyed solicitor. In anticipation he tasted delightedly the adroit lies he proposed to tell on the next day in the witness-box. He need not have done that, thought Keddy. As his spirits rose he pictured the scene of victory. He enjoyed the plight the Oakes couple would be in, their bankruptcy, the selling of their goods, and their ruin. All was strained, bitter, and restless. It was wonderful of Curly to take it

so good-naturedly. But since Keddy had talked to him about Bobby in Scotland, Curly had behaved like the natural saint that Arthur always maintained him to be.

At the end of dinner Curly proposed an amusement which he called slumming. They went in a hansom to a quarter lying east of the city and wandered about in streets where the chances of some form of row were decently high. Bobby vastly enjoyed himself, nor did he fail with that touch of provocation which now and then might have converted the persons of the neighbourhood from rude scoffers into physical aggressors. Keddy had a good plenty of those thrills of excitement so dear to, and so bad for, his heart. But the peace was not broken. Bobby went back to the house in Ebury Street where he lodged with his mother till the result of the trial should be known, and Keddy and Curly drove on to the Paddington Hotel.

And out of the slumming came the dream. Keddy found a long letter from Mr. Carpenter, which he read in his bedroom. He burned it, not in anger, but because he was prudent, and knew the proper place for compromising documents. Tired in muscle and emotion, he went to bed, and after a space of void he was back again at the east of the city where the street lights blazed by the shops of those who sold fried fish, and the lanky youths went by with scarfs wound round their necks as if they would be throttled. They all had names, too—names which Bobby would insist on using, which was the most perilously insulting thing that could be done. Keddy knew it was insulting. He wished Bobby would not do it. There was one called Mr. Wellington, and it was dreadful when Bobby said 'Mr. Wellington' in his cool, provocative way. Moreover, Curly had gone; he had gone to get change for a five-pound note. Keddy knew it without being told. In dreams one perceives the truth intuitively, to a certain point. But in which direction did he go? It was impossible to know. And the crowd of lanky youths was getting large, enormous, menacing. Keddy knew quite well that Mr. Wellington was making mischief. He did not feel nearly as brave in the dream

as he had felt in real life. He wanted Mr. Grove, who was on the platform at Paddington Station, quite close—maddeningly close, if only the crowd would let you get through. The noise was terrific. It was quite hard to realize how terrible the situation had become. Keddy kept telling himself that it was real, that the time had come, though he never could have believed it would. And he knew they would say it was Bobby's fault for calling Mr. Wellington by name. So it was. He knew it; he wouldn't deny it. It was outrageous of Bobby. Bobby was so often outrageous. And Bobby was separated from him now. He was over there, in a place that Keddy knew. Keddy knew perfectly well what was happening. He knew that they had got Bobby at last, and were doing it, the thing, the deed that he had always feared. They were doing it at last. And Bobby was *expecting* him to go and help—*expecting* him, while Keddy knew that he mustn't, couldn't, because he was stopped. He had known all along that he couldn't go. It was the most fearful thing that had ever happened. He could not move his legs; he could not get his arms to work; he could not even wriggle, not even breathe. Yet he was straining every nerve. He was determined to go. He would be suffocated unless he went. He would be suffocated in another moment. Ah!—

There, he was free. He sat up in bed, and found himself panting and sweating. So it was a dream, and here was the quiet room, and the electric light if he cared to turn it on. And Curly was across the passage. Nothing had happened—nothing at all. Has nothing, indeed, happened, when the brain has been seared deep with the most terrible of emotions? He felt it still, even now that the light was on. What the devil had he meant by piling up such a lot of clothing when the night was clearly getting warmer? He threw off an eider-down quilt. He got up and drank water. Then the sweat was cold on his body, and he hurried back to bed chilled. The dream feeling stirred again, stiffening and hardening in his body. It is not pleasant to think that there lies, stored in the musty cellars of the mind, this

capacity for sheer terror for which our waking moments seldom have more use than for the vermiform appendix.

Keddy's head throbbed with it. He turned out the light and lay down. He shut his eyes, and the grip of terror began to tighten again. He had to stir himself, to open his eyes and stare at the darkness while he held his mind down to the common-sense facts of life. But as often as he verged on sleep he verged also on that terror. He experienced again the knowledge that appalling things were happening to Bobby—things of which he could understand nothing but their terror. So again he cursed himself and shook himself awake. Bobby was in Ebury Street asleep, for it was three o'clock, and appalling things were *not* happening to him ; it was nonsense. Nor had his conduct in the East End been outrageous, hardly at all—hardly at all. So Keddy argued with himself, till he slept again.

Curly came to wake him. Why was it that of any given party at Oxford or at home Keddy was the last awake ? Curly stood over him in a big overcoat.

'Oh, I've had such a beastly damned, silly, rotten dream,' he murmured vindictively, as he blinked up at Curly.

But Curly told him where to find the bath-room, and said that time pressed.

'I will settle accounts with that dream,' Keddy told himself as he saw the wholesome water steaming out into the bath. 'It was because of the slumming, of course, and because of the way Bobby went on at dinner. That was it—that was it. And who was that Mr.—Mr.—'

It had vanished. Just as his memory reached out to grasp it, it vanished. He could not recall the name of the person whom Bobby had insulted, or of what the insult consisted. It all seemed absurd. He could not remember who had been there, or what had happened. The dream was going ; all its facts were getting blurred. But the most curious thing of all was that the terror it had set stirring all over him remained to harass him though the dream itself was as good as forgotten. He hurried over his bath. He went recklessly through his

easy shaving. He dressed himself with feverish haste. It was like the night when Arthur Pollock refused to help them in their trouble, and all the nerves of Keddy had itched to press forward and be near Bobby. Suppose they were to smash up Bobby in cross-examination to-day! Suppose they were to rag him as badly as they ragged Porker! Then the terror and distress of that dream would have been prophetic. And then—— But Keddy did not want to think in detail about what would happen in court or afterwards. He remembered vividly now and then the feeling of suffocation that ended the dream. There was a feeling that could come in dreams—a feeling of imperious overriding impulse to wrench every fibre of his being on Bobby's behalf in obedience to the instinct of the moment. And in court would that feeling come again? Whew! How a stiff collar can hurt your thumbs if you put it on in a hurry! Never mind about things in court till the time comes! And afterwards, when quiet times and Mr. Carpenter return—that was what Keddy would not consider. He remembered, rather, the suffocation in the dream. So he tugged his tie into decent shape, belaboured with brushes the crisp, fair stuff on his head, dragged on his coat and hurried down to Curly and breakfast. His talk was of hansoms and hurry. He was excited. He would not tell about his dream, but laughed and said it was absurd. And when he asked them for a fish did he deserve that they should bring him a bloater? He hated bloaters. It had to return to the place whence it came, and an omelette came hurrying in its stead. But Keddy was not hungry. He only wanted quantities of tea and Curly's opinion on a hundred points and chances. How would Bobby get on? Ten o'clock! How would they be feeling at ten o'clock to-night? Drunk, said Curly, if they won the day, judging from Keddy's excitement. But Keddy said no. He would not be a bit excited after it was over, he felt sure, whether they won or lost. One thing he would do—he would get a larger size of collar. He was quite sure this size was too small. It choked him.

‘Now let’s go,’ he added ; and they went.

‘Oh, about my dream,’ he began, as their cab went down Oxford Street. ‘My word, it was one of those dreams that make you tie the sheets up into knots, you know. I’ve forgotten all about it, only I was in the devil of a funk when I woke up, all about Bobby. The fact is, I’m in a funk about his cross-examination, Curly. What do you really think about it ? Will he be clever enough ? Lord ! it will be pretty beastly, whatever happens.’

For the sake of Curly’s consolation he had spoken of the dream and confessed his fear. But to Curly’s consolation, when it came, he did not listen. The thing was getting so near. The picture was so easy to imagine, after yesterday, in all its details and all its possible terror. There would be the people in the court, all looking at Bobby and whispering about him. And the jury would watch him, and listen to everything with that sheepish attentiveness which irritated you because you could not really tell which way they were going. And sometimes old Sandilands would look up from his note-book and glance at Bobby through his glasses. Would it be Calcroft who would cross-examine him, or the other fellow ? In either case there would be those questions—streams of questions—so dangerous because they seemed so innocent. And Bobby would answer, keeping very cool. And suddenly they would turn on him, and the whole place would begin to dance and rock, and one’s breath would come and go in jerks, because they had caught hold of one of his lies. Then a question which he could not answer. He would go rather pale, and his eyes would look very clear and straight, and there would be dead silence. He would not bluster like Colquhoun. He would think ; you would know that he was thinking like the devil. You would itch to whisper what you thought he ought to say. Yet you would be tied. That was what happened in the dream ; it came back now. The judge would say, ‘You must answer the learned counsel’s questions, Mr. Wilton.’ It would be awful, because Bobby was such a good fighter, and it is far

worse to see a good fighter held down and hit about than if it were someone who yielded without a struggle. He would stick to his lies, quite coolly and slowly, no matter how obvious they were. He would have to contradict something he said two minutes ago, and all the court would stare in mocking amusement, while only Keddy would know what it was like inside his mind. And at last he would leave the box and come and sit down next to Keddy. What would they each say then ?

Such was the scene that imagination pictured in the rattling hansom. The breathless minutes followed it, like a comet's tail, illuminated with nervous excitement. Somewhere among them came the morning greetings with friends at the Law Courts, the pressure of Mr. Carpenter's hand, the spikiness of Bobby, who was too intent on whispering in Mr. Lane's ear to have much attention left for other friends. There were comments on yesterday, forecasts of to-day, and the court was pleasantly empty at this early hour. But Keddy had only a mechanical perception of things around him. They were merely the stage property for the scene which existed now in imagination, which the coming moment was to bring to life. For that moment Keddy lived.

Yet how different it proved to be from the expected hurricane of catchy questions and stern rebukes ! Three-quarters of all that Keddy had anticipated never came to pass. Of course the mere external setting was the same. The court filled up. The jury sat stiffly, listened, whispered among themselves. Barristers, robed and unrobed, sat packed in their row of seats. Behind them the rows were full of interested people, and the spaces by the doors were tight with spectators, as they had been yesterday. Curly and Mr. Carpenter, Tatham and Delville, were just along the row at the end of which was Keddy. Bobby's vacant place was next to his. Over there were the enemy, all but Colquhoun. Mr. Justice Sandilands wrote calmly in his note-book in the serener atmosphere above. But was it serener ? Could anything have passed more serenely than this crisis which Keddy had so greatly feared ? Here actually it

was in progress, happening in his eyes and ears, with the minutes ticking past in which the clever counsel was to have laid Bobby in the dust amid the smiles of the jury, the wrath of the judge, the amusement of the crowd, and the shame and pain that would drive like blinding rain against one's eyes. Not a shred of the expected happened. Even his own feelings Keddy had misjudged. For instead of distress and shame he had merely distress and despair.

Bobby appeared in his morning freshness, and it never left him to the end. There was no reason why it should. He leant his arms on the light oak balustrade, and hardly moved a muscle from beginning to end. He answered Mr. Calcroft with the same cool urbanity that he had shown to his own counsel in his examination-in-chief. He was neat, with his hair smooth and glossy, and only one thing was wrong about him. His eyes were too unflinching.

Not a question was asked him that he could not answer easily. Not a trap was laid; not a lie exposed; not a rebuke administered. Instead of Mr. Grove's cheery chaff and severity there was a smoothness like velvet. 'Miss Oakes says so and so,' Mr. Calcroft would say, standing quiet and courteous with his hands behind him. 'You say it was not so?' 'Very well.' 'It never happened at all?' 'I see.' And so it went on, question and answer, blandly asked, politely answered, and the answer received without surprise or incredulity.

'Damn it! I could do this myself,' whispered Curly in his blindness. Keddy did not answer him. If Curly could not see the truth, it was not likely words would show it him. You had only to look around, at Bobby, at the judge, the jury, the people—you had only to become receptive to the meaning of the awed hush prevailing in the court, to know that the level of Bobby's chances was falling like the mercury in a storm.

'You parted that evening,' Mr. Calcroft said in his cool, dispassionate way, 'without any matrimonial understanding whatever?'

'None whatever.'



'You returned the letters Miss Oakes wrote you. You had no idea that they contained any references to an engagement between you?'

'No, I had not,' said Bobby. But if you knew Bobby's face well, you could see that it was the face of a drowning man.

'I see,' said Mr. Calcroft deliberately.

If they would only give him a chance! If they would only attempt to catch him, or try the effect of jeers and threats! If only Bobby could get a chance of showing how well he knew his case, how consistent it all was, and how hard it was to upset his denials by analysis or comparison! But there was no varying in the child-like simplicity of Mr. Calcroft's questions. There was no chance for Bobby except to keep up that stream of blank denials which began to jar and grate on one's nerves. Heavens! It seemed as if he were denying everything under the sun.

The judge had executed a fair number of his long, reflective gazes at the witness. Keddy, who saw everything, missed none of these. He hates him, Keddy thought. Indeed, he felt that he understood the judge's sensations. There was a good deal to dislike in Bobby just now, quite apart from the unpleasant story. And then, the judge had never seen him at Orchard Wilton with his hair disordered. There was nothing wrong about Bobby's manners. But he looked, while Keddy eased the tension of the time by searching for a word—he looked too *bold*.

And now the judge leant back and pulled the flesh of his cheek. He was watching Mr. Calcroft; he was enjoying him.

Counsel may meet the lies of a witness with a fine show of incredulity. They may even smile, or perform a gesture like a shrug; they may wink at the jury, or they may turn on the witness with wrath or with a grand manner of solemnity, and bid him be careful. Mr. Calcroft did none of these. At the jury he never looked, though they looked much at him. And he was never for an instant angry with Bobby. The rôle of advocate

seemed to have dropped off him, and he took all the witness's denials like a man who knows the truth too well to need confirmation or fear contradiction. He stood with his hands clasped behind him, and his clear voice sounded not without a ring of sadness. He was like a man who, perhaps, has a son at Oxford himself, who sees a young man disgracing himself, and is sorry. There came a time when you might almost say he was giving Bobby his chance.

'It'll not be long before Calcroft will get any figure he chooses to ask,' said a young barrister standing just below where Keddy sat.

His friend purred assent. The comments of this pair were a cause of much irritation to Keddy.

'I wonder what the fellow they call Forth will say! Will he stick to his pal?'

The other man wondered. It was certainly all the chance they had got left.

Then Mr. Calcroft made an allusion to Keddy's presence in the cottage at Wytham. The judge showed signs of faint animation.

'Is Mr. Forth in court?' he asked.

Mr. Grove whisked round to Mr. Hastings-Smith, who whispered something. From his place in front of Mr. Grove Mr. Lane turned round with face distressed and apologetic, and whispered a great deal. Mr. Grove's whispers were emphatic and impatient. The judge repeated his question.

'Yes, my lord,' said Mr. Grove at last, half rising. 'I understand he is here.'

The judge nodded. By Mr. Calcroft the incident passed unnoticed. He paused a moment after it, looking down at his papers. Then he looked at Bobby, who waited.

'Well, Mr. Wilton,' he said quietly, 'we are to take it that you believe Miss Oakes to have invented this story from beginning to end. Is that so? You really think that?'

It was not because of any embarrassment that Bobby seemed to pull himself together at this renewal of the questions. Keddy perceived his exercise of will-power.

But it was not the effort of a man in a difficulty so much as the saving of appearances by a man who despairs.

‘I don’t know whose invention it is,’ he said, again with the unblinking look about his eyes. ‘It is certainly someone’s.’

‘And Mr. Colquhoun—you really believe that he came here to swear to a story he knows to be a fabrication? You believe that a man in his position could do that?’

‘One moment——’

The judge had stirred suddenly, and turned to Bobby. The witness-box was at the opposite end of the bench from the jury’s seats, and what the judge said was so quiet that perhaps the jury did not hear it. Keddy did; but Keddy’s senses were very wide awake.

‘Mr. Wilton, I don’t want to remind you of your oath. I only remind you that you are a gentleman.’

How much did it cost Bobby then to keep down the flush that would have risen? In Keddy’s face there was no keeping it down at all. But Bobby, with his cold, light eyes, looked from the judge to Mr. Calcroft, and there was neither colour in his face nor a tremor on the fine curve of his lips.

‘Do you really believe that the chaplain of your college came here to support an abandoned woman in ruining one of his pupils by perjury?’

‘Yes I do,’ said Bobby.

‘Very well!’ And Mr. Calcroft permitted himself the faintest gesture with his hands that had rested on the papers before him.

‘Very well, Mr. Wilton!’

For a moment there was silence, with Bobby waiting and Mr. Calcroft looking down; and Keddy glued his eyes to his knees.

Then Mr. Calcroft sat down.

A sudden impulse made Keddy look along to Mr. Carpenter on the other side of Curly. Mr. Carpenter was gazing at one finger-tip that lay out on his knee. His face wore a curious look of intensity. Was he praying? Well, the moment was now near which had wrung prayers enough from Mr. Carpenter.

'Is your turn next?' Curly asked Keddy.

'I suppose so.'

Mr. Grove was doing Bobby's re-examination. But the simplicity of Mr. Calcroft's questions caused that operation to be short and unimportant.

So Keddy knew that his time had come. And the barrister on his right had said he was the one chance of the defence! There was a gentle rustling in the court just now, while Mr. Grove chirped across at Bobby. The sensational feeling was less marked. People were breathing again, so to speak, after the impression made by Mr. Calcroft's cross-examination. There was less tension. But there was tension enough for Keddy. Was this the scene in which Mr. Carpenter had said that one thought would bring Him—the Lord—to Keddy's side? That remembrance his mind met with a kind of contortion. That—that thought, at least, he would banish. Not that—not now; when it was the dream over again, sweating and suffocation.

'By Jove!' Curly whispered suddenly. 'Bobby is rather fine.'

Keddy looked up, though he knew it would only strangle him the more. And he saw what Curly meant, another characteristic touch of Bobby's audacious coolness. While Mr. Grove was questioning him he was quietly writing on a scrap of paper, answering Mr. Grove without raising his eyes.

'Look at Sandilands just gloating with hatred!' Curly whispered again.

Certainly the judge did not look as if he found much to like in Bobby.

As Tatham impressed upon them afterwards, it was perfectly mad of Bobby to behave as he did. This brazen callousness was utterly tactless. You could feel in the air how it was setting opinion against him more than ever. Mr. Grove had finished with him. He said, 'Thank you, Mr. Wilton'; and yet Bobby went on writing till he had finished.

Curly, you might say, was rubbing his hands with amused appreciation,

‘It’s like Bobby turned in a construe at school,’ he said.

Keddy, however, had rather lost the faculty of appreciation. Mr. Carpenter had not moved his eyes an inch from that finger-tip. Mr. Grove and Mr. Lane were having a rapid whispered altercation. Mr. Hastings-Smith was craning forward to get in his word. The jury were putting their heads together. All seemed for the moment confused, and once more Keddy felt the pains of suffocation in a literal sense.

Bobby was coming down from the box, unhurried, unembarrassed, watching his lawyers with some curiosity.

He was getting nearer. What Keddy showed was a little sulky gibbing; what he felt was something much more stormy and painful. Surely the worst moment was this one! When he was actually in the box he would be, he knew, as cool as a cucumber. His heart would keep quiet. His breath would come properly.

The rows of seats had solid wooden backs, like the pews in churches. From these raised seats behind the counsels’ row you went down a step or two to the space by the door. Bobby came and stood on these steps in his leisurely way, and leant his shoulders against the back of the row in front of Keddy. It was like him to turn his back on the judge. It was the kind of thing that appealed to Curly. It was, of its kind, well executed and fine.

Keddy’s collar was tight then. Things around were indistinct and blurred. Were the lawyers still frantically arguing the whispered point that seemed to block their progress? It did not matter. Bobby took hold of the lapet of Keddy’s coat.

‘Do I come next?’ Keddy asked, for something to say.

‘You see this?’ Bobby whispered, holding up the note he had written in the box. ‘I want you to go out at once and get a cab and drive to Ebury Street, and send this up to my mother. She’s in bed with a cold. You’re to wait for an answer. Do you see? Whatever happens, you’re not to come away without an answer.’

‘But my evidence——’

Bobby was imperious.

'No, no. You're to go and do this. You're to go at once. Go on! You'll be back in time for your evidence.'

'Mr. Wilton, Mr. Wilton!' said Mr. Hastings-Smith in much agitation, leaning over from in front.

Bobby pushed Keddy down the steps towards the door, where he made his way through the group of people.

The judge was waiting patiently. No doubt he was expecting the defendant's counsel to surrender. Bobby was talking to Mr. Hastings-Smith. But as Keddy opened the swinging glass door of the court he heard Mr. Grove call Curly into the box. There was no surrender yet.

He hurried down the round staircase to the central hall. He looked at his watch. It is an instinct to look at one's watch in any calculation of time, and it had a calming effect on his somewhat blurred perceptions. Four witnesses there were, with little to say, and then himself. Tatham, Delville, Curly, Mr. Carpenter, and was it possible they would drag the time on until he could return? He was sure they couldn't. He was puzzled. His possible escape from the crisis hardly comforted him at all.

He admonished his cabman. He rattled through the streets and thought of pretty well nothing. The ceasing of excitement left him almost sleepy.

At the house in Ebury Street he sent up the note to Mrs. Wilton. He waited in the sitting-room. He walked about; he sat down; he looked at his watch. At last he rang the bell.

'Has Mrs. Wilton had that note?'

She had. As to the answer, the girl would go upstairs and inquire.

'Mrs. Wilton will send an answer presently,' she reported.

'But I must have it at once,' Keddy insisted.

The girl departed with this message. She did not come back.

Keddy's impatience became unbearable. Time was passing. It was nearly an hour since he left the court. Again he rang the bell.

But it was to no purpose. He could not extract the answer for which he waited while his presence in court might be so urgently needed. He could not stand it. With or without an answer he felt that absolutely he must go back. It was disobedience; but who could have foreseen this delay?

His cab was waiting. He left the house, and drove off to the Strand at the best pace available. He jumped out and hurried into the building.

There, in the central hall, was Curly pacing up and down. And Curly meant news.

'What has happened? Is it finished?' Keddy asked.

Finished? It was all finished except the trifling circumstance of the verdict. The jury had retired. Some fellow in the jury was supposed to have said he would never give a verdict for a designing woman, so they had to retire. That was the story—Lane's story—so Curly said. Probably a lie.

'My goodness! And I wasn't there! What the devil did Bobby mean by sending me away?'

Curly hadn't a notion. He was irritable, for him. It was part of the attack of nerves which had made him unable to wait in court for the verdict. It was wonderful how Curly had lately developed the instinct of sticking up for his class.

'You see,' he explained, 'they wouldn't hear my evidence, or Tatham's, or Carpenter's. Calcroft said it wasn't necessary, because they admitted all the facts about Porker planning to catch Bobby. Porker was just given away with a pound of tea. Delville didn't take long, and so Grove made his speech for Bobby, and Calcroft against him. Then Sandilands summed up all against him, all down the line, and then the jury went off.'

'Let's go up to the court,' said Keddy, without commenting on the story.

'All right.'

'What happens if the jury never agree at all?'

That was the sort of question which would have been answered with amplitude by Tatham. Curly was more

hazy. They were on the big winding staircase that goes up to the court corridor. What about the seven Bishops? Weren't the jury locked up and kept there till they either agreed or died? Well, perhaps the seven Bishops made a precedent. But it did not matter. Here, half-way up the staircase, the question lost its importance. A wider answer was given. No matter what pains and privations a contentious jury might suffer—for this jury was no longer contentious. It had given its verdict.

They met, on the staircase, Mr. Carpenter and Tatham, Mr. Lane and Bobby, slowly descending. Mr. Lane's face alone was enough to show the densest observer that Bobby had lost the case.

Keddy and Curly stopped.

'Wherever in the world have you been?'

The question was Tatham's. He seemed shocked. His business mind revolted from mismanagement.

'The judge asked for you again and again,' he told Keddy. 'They all made a tremendous point of it.'

There was no use in answering Tatham. Bobby was just behind him, and had an appearance of engrossing interest in what Lane was saying. He was nodding his head very near to the solicitor's.

'I couldn't get an answer,' Keddy said to him rather awkwardly. 'I sent a lot of messages, but I couldn't get an answer.'

Bobby raised his eyebrows. He accepted the explanation. He was not very friendly.

'Oh, Mr. Forth, Mr. Forth!' the solicitor exclaimed, wailing and gesticulating.

The moment was rather confusing. Besides, Keddy longed to know the verdict, and feared to ask. Mr. Carpenter took his arm and would have drawn him away.

'Oh, Bobby, did it matter?' Keddy asked painfully.

'Matter?' Bobby turned to Lane with the word, laughing.

Then it was that Keddy heard Tatham giving Curly the news, decently whispered, it must be admitted. 'Three thousand pounds.'

'Malcolm, let us go on,' Mr. Carpenter urged gently.



One wants—with the paralysis of embarrassment turning the whole situation into stone—one wants to say so much, to do something so absolutely right and proper to the moment, something that Bobby would like ; and of course nothing comes of it. The only policy was Mr. Carpenter's, as he drew Keddy on down the stairs.

Bobby had his hand on Lane's shoulder. He was whispering something that looked almost as if he were chaffing him. Of course it was Bobby's way. He and Lane lingered behind.

It was Curly, as the news sank in, who did most to alleviate the position.

‘What a damned—scandal!’ he exclaimed.

Mr. Carpenter had an arm for Curly also, and they went downstairs.

Bobby, with Mr. Lane, turned off another way.

Surely, as they stood at the door, with Curly getting cabs, they were back again in Oxford! The fabric of London and the passing phantoms of judges and counsel had dissolved like mist and were gone. It was Oxford but for a short, swift journey in the train.

‘Oh, poor old Bobby, poor old Bobby!’ The thought found vent at last.

There was a pressure of Mr. Carpenter's arm.

‘We are all sorry, Malcolm. God has taken His own way with Bobby. And for you, Malcolm, what shall we say? He has worked a miracle.’

Keddy bit his lips. It was not the time for talking about those things. He must see Bobby, and then there would be Oxford, and it would all seem clearer.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE AMAZING FACT

Not until a day in January did the amazing fact transpire.

The Oxford term was beginning. Captain Forth, who now exercised his irrepressible powers of enjoyment by driving, with little or no experience, a big motor, took his son from home as far as Reading on his way. There a second-class smoking carriage was found in the Oxford train, and only one other traveller to share it with Keddy. In his corner Keddy made the best use of a big woolly overcoat and opened on his knees what was always part of the ritual of his journeys by train—the *Pink 'Un*. He would have found it hard to explain why he always read the *Pink 'Un* in the train, and never at any other time. It was simply a piece of ritual. It always had been done, from early days when the long journeys from Scotland meant an escape from the Presbyterian uncle and the atmosphere of his manse; and Keddy was sure it always would be done, for ever and ever. He was impervious to his father's mockery. He preserved the good custom with conscientious diligence. And had it been otherwise, perhaps, the amazing fact would never have come to light.

For his companion watched him, studied him, puzzled at a faintly familiar face, and surely it was the *Pink 'Un* that gave him courage to cross the carriage and sit down opposite and talk.

'That's a good little paper, sir,' he began, still racking his brains for the reason why Keddy's face was familiar to his memory. He saw many faces in his busy life. Where had he seen this one?

It was in no way welcome to Keddy to have this intrusion. As companions in a railway-carriage most people will do all right. But when it comes to chatting and hobnobbing one's requirements are higher. There was a kind of ready-made intimacy about this young man and his way of starting talk. Keddy did not like him. He did not like his eyes, which looked as if they might start winking at you, or his smile, which seemed to be always letting you into a secret that you didn't particularly want to share. He was rather Keddy's idea of a clerk in an office in the city, the kind of man Bobby had to meet now, whom he did not like. He was about twenty-two, and there was nothing much wrong with his dress. Moreover, Keddy was travelling early in the afternoon on purpose to avoid the fuss about luggage and cabs, and for the sake of a quiet journey.

'Will you have some of it?' he asked, in answer to the remark about the paper. And he began to divide it.

But this manœuvre did not succeed. The offer was refused. The man pushed his hat further to the back of his head, leant forward, and looked more like winking than ever.

'Now, I'm sure I've seen your face before,' he exclaimed.

With fairly good grace Keddy surrendered, and laid down his paper on his knees.

'Oh, I wonder if you have,' he said.

'It was—it was,' said the eager little man—'it was in the Wilton case. Why, of course! You were in the Wilton case!'

'Oh! and were you?' Keddy asked, pleasantly enough.

'We were,' the man answered. 'We were in it very much. I'm in Loudham and Lane's office, you see. So I was jolly well *in* it as much as anyone could be. My hat! that was a bad business.'

Keddy maintained the usual respectful attention with which he was wont to receive other people's remarks.

'How stupid of me!' the solicitor's clerk went on, slapping his knees. 'Of course I remember your face quite well now. You're a friend of Mr. Wilton's. You were in court all the time.'

'Nearly all,' said Keddy. He saw that his friend had not yet got a perfect recollection of the part which he might or might not have taken in that famous trial.

'Well, Mr. Wilton was a good 'un !' the man exclaimed. 'I never saw a better. That's what I call pluck ; and brains, too. My word ! he knew how to look after himself. I was downright sorry he lost that case—I was, really. You should have seen him in our office all those times he came to talk about it. My word ! He knew a thing or two, he did. That notion about the Oxford parson chap trumping up the whole story—that was his, all his own. And mighty smart he was about putting it together. He just enjoyed it ! He ought to have been a lawyer. He went after 'em like a bloodhound—sort of smacking his lips with pleasure at every new idea, you know. And not too particular about what was *quite* true and what wasn't, you know, no more than you ought to be when you've got to deal with an audacious woman like that Oakes.'

No man shows worse for a touch of genuine feeling, and Keddy observed that this little clerk saw Bobby as a hero. But he would have mustered more geniality for the man had he not recalled the picture of Bobby smacking his lips over some cunning new lie. That was a recollection which might have been left buried.

'You see this pin I'm wearing in my tie now ?' the clerk continued. 'He gave me that—gave it me for the trouble I'd taken about his case. He put his hand on my shoulder, you know, and said, "You're a good fellow, Walker ; you're a fellow worth having at a pinch."'

Alas for the 'pinch' which made Bobby caress this fellow !

'You see, I didn't try on any worrying with him. I took what he said and asked no questions. Now there's Grove—clever as you like, but he kept on saying, "What's the truth, Mr. Wilton ; why can't you tell me a straight story ?" and all that. But I just took what he said and asked no questions.'

Keddy could imagine it all very well indeed.

'He's game,' said the clerk.

'Rather,' said Keddy, able to be more cordial.

'And he's cute,' said the clerk.

Keddy smiled.

'I'm off to Oxford to settle some of his debts,' the clerk explained. 'We're not sure if some of these tradesmen aren't putting it on rather stiff. Bad lot tradesmen are sometimes. But Mr. Wilton—he's not one to be caught by a cheating tailor, not he.'

The clerk had quite a knack of drawing horrid pictures of Bobby. It was to be imagined they had put their heads together again as they had done over poor Porker. And Keddy felt irritable.

'He ought to have been a lawyer, that's a fact,' said the clerk, 'though he'll make a fine bart some day. Before long, I expect, too. I know he doesn't expect the old chap to last long. He rubs his hands over that.'

An exaggeration, surely! Keddy could not quite accept this last touch. But the clerk did not seem to expect him to say much.

'He's got a fine head for the law,' he went on. 'And yet—if that case wasn't just thrown away! I never saw a case chucked away like it. Nor Mr. Lane, either. There's never been a case like it in the office. All going like one o'clock it was, and then crash, and all of us left in the lurch. D'you know Mr. Forth?'

'Er—yes,' said Keddy.

'Thought you would, as you're a friend of Mr. Wilton's. Well, I expect you know all about it.'

'I don't,' said Keddy. And suddenly he found that the clerk was a fascinating companion. 'What was it?'

'Well, Forth was in the room when Mr. Wilton promised—you know what I mean—when she *said* he promised to marry her. And we said, "Stick him in the box. He's a pal; he'll be all right." Why! don't you see? It all depended on him—all, the whole story we'd knocked up—and we were just going off to get a signed proof from him—'

'To get what?' Keddy asked.

How the time had passed! Here they were, rattling and

jolting over the points at Didcot. Keddy and the clerk had to lean forward to talk. There was such a noise. 'You thought—what?' Keddy had to ask. 'He told you to—what?' And he leaned forward further still, nodded his head, listened, questioned, till Didcot was behind them.

'There! Now what's a man to make of that? Did you ever hear anything like it?'

'Never,' said Keddy, with the peculiar emphasis that one lays on words which come mechanically while the mind is wandering from the point.

'No, never—I really never did.'

There was a kind of catch in his breath. He sat up straight, buttoned up the collar of his coat, looked to right and left through the carriage windows, and finally set his gaze on the clerk as though he were an inanimate pile of rugs.

'But for that we'd have won the case,' the clerk declared. 'It was rank madness.'

'Rank madness,' Keddy repeated solemnly, and then awoke to the fact that he was being rude.

'Oh, I say, won't you have a cigarette?'

The clerk took one.

'And won't you have a look at the *Pink 'Un*?'

The clerk did not wish to, but had not the talent to refuse.

So Keddy was left alone in the softly running train, through Culham and Radley, in a world that the enchanter's wand had touched. And this, in a way which should be a wonder for the wise, had happened in a single moment, and by reason of one fact now known. The fact had fallen like a stone in a pool, and the round ripples lapped outwards till the whole field of vision was alive with wonder and delight. The frosty freshness of the country through the windows was part of it, and the big red sun. It was in the delicious motion of the train, and in the warmth of Keddy's coat. It was everywhere, and yet he dared not let his mind examine it. One shrinks from sudden happiness with a kind of fear. It is too delicate for the rough touch of thought. It is put off

till the mind is better prepared for it. But the forms of thought press up against one's will, and Keddy was filled with wonder that there could be in all the world a thing so beautiful and splendid as this one piece of knowledge. To the value of everything in life it had added tenfold in the twinkling of an eye.

The train stopped at Oxford. Keddy and the clerk stood together on the platform. Keddy smiled, and held out his hand. He said good-bye, and that was enough for the clerk.

With the luck that he always expected, and generally had, he found a man who would do him the favour he wanted.

'Be a good fellow and take my things up to college with yours,' he asked.

So, freed from this care, he hastened out to the station-yard and hailed a cab.

'St. Saviour's House,' he said, 'and drive fast.'

He leaned his arms on the doors of the cab, and was pleased and proud at his self-restraint in keeping calm at such a moment. Why, no one looking at his face would suspect that anything had happened! He felt the pride one feels at certain hours of certain days when one has walked all the way across the quad without making a false step, and has said good-night to several people without giving oneself away. What splendid self-control!

He passed undergraduates walking and bicycling. He pitied them deeply. He pitied everyone. For there could not be a man alive enjoying such happiness as his.

Again with masterly self-possession he paid his cab and rang the door-bell of St. Saviour's House. Mr. Carpenter was in. With pronounced deliberation he marched upstairs, stopping with infinite self-admiration to look at a new picture on the landing. Was it not wonderful to be able to do that? Then he knocked at Mr. Carpenter's door, entered, and grinned.

Mr. Carpenter had spent the last weeks of the vacation with his sisters at Biarritz. He was in blooming health. The sweep of his cassock was wide across his girth. He had been 'on corn,' and he pawed the ground to be started

on his term's work with a load behind him and a hill before. Of his term's work here was the first specimen, not an unpleasing one, as Keddy stood grinning and sparkling at the eyes.

'Malcolm! Why, dear old boy, this is a pleasure indeed! How nice of you to come and see me! What? Straight from the station? Why, that's capital—capital! And how are you? What a question! with you looking like that. Ah! The heart doctors aren't going to make their fortunes out of *you*!'

And Keddy's hand and arm were squeezed with the fervour of six weeks' absence.

'Dear old boy! It's so early for tea. We'll talk first, and then have tea at four.'

'I've only half an hour,' said Keddy, grinning still. 'I'm going off by the three-fifty to town.'

'To town? Dear me! What energy!'

'Oh, you mustn't ask me why,' said Keddy. 'It's a secret.'

'Secrets!' Mr. Carpenter said merrily. 'Well, we've half an hour. Sit down here and tell me all about yourself.'

Keddy regarded the armchair.

'No, I don't think I could sit down,' he said. 'I'll stand.'

He leant his back against the mantelpiece, and his grin was recurring. There was something very mysterious about Keddy. He was like a man who is just going to say, 'I'm engaged to be married—to your sister!'

He gave the news of his father and mother and brothers. They were all right. That was all he had to say about them now.

And Bobby?

Well, Mr. Carpenter's news was more recent than Keddy's. He had stayed last Sunday with his brother, the India merchant, at Godalming, and Bobby had been there for the week-end.

'My brother is quite, *quite* satisfied with him,' Mr. Carpenter explained. 'He gets on at the office very well indeed. He doesn't seem to have made great friends



with some of the clerks yet, but then—well. But my brother likes him very much. They asked him for the week-end, and my sister-in-law was charmed with him. You should have seen him, Malcolm dear, teaching the little boys to ride—my word, he was severe with them, I can tell you, and they made a great hero of him.'

Keddy saw the chance of a debating point.

'That's it,' he said solemnly, 'make a hero of Bobby, and he is one.'

Bobby planning lies in a solicitor's office! Bobby severely teaching the little boys to ride! The two Bobbies! Whew! Keddy's breath caught again.

'Dear old boy! I'm so glad about it all. Poor Bobby has a great deal to get rid of—we know that, don't we? But I really do believe that some day we shall see him all we would like, Malcolm—all we hope and pray for.'

'Mr. Carpenter,' said the impressive voice.

Keddy had come into the room grinning, to publish great tidings. He had stood itching, with the tidings buzzing in his head. But now the time came, and unforeseen difficulties arose in their telling. Mr. Carpenter looked up sharply.

'Mr. Carpenter, we all go on talking about Bobby. He's a bit of a blackguard, and all that, and there was the Oakes woman and all those lies in court. There isn't anybody who has done such beastly things as Bobby. What would you say if you heard he had done one thing so absolutely splendid that it turns you all upside down, and you can hardly talk about it?'

Mr. Carpenter adjusted his glasses.

'Malcolm!' he said in wonder.

'That's what I came to tell you about,' said Keddy, looking very straight into his eyes.

'I travelled down by accident with one of Loudham and Lane's clerks. He talked all about the trial. He didn't know who I was, and he kept hammering away about Bobby's cleverness at law, and how funny it was of him to do one very stupid thing. He told the old story, you know, about everything turning on my evidence. And

that was where he said Bobby went absolutely mad, because——'

After all, in spite of past warnings, Keddy had never gone and got that larger size of collar! It was a pity, for this one was decidedly tight.

'Yes, Malcolm,' Mr. Carpenter murmured, standing rigid by the desk with piercing gaze.

But Keddy kicked the hearthrug.

'Oh, confound it! I must go back to the beginning. Ages ago, down at Orchard Wilton, you know, he was saying how he could beat the Oakes woman because he and Delville and I would all swear against her. And I suppose—I suppose he saw I didn't think it all quite as jolly as he did. He knew I should have to stick up for him, you know, whatever happened, and when they said they would come to get my evidence——'

The unforeseen difficulties were very serious now. But Mr. Carpenter repeated, very softly and kindly, 'Yes, Malcolm.'

'You see,' said Keddy, sternly business-like, 'this is what the clerk told me. I'm telling you what he said.'

'I understand,' said Mr. Carpenter.

'Well, Bobby wouldn't let them bring me into the thing at all. That's it,' said Keddy shortly.

It was done. And this was all the sensation with which he could clothe his description of the most wonderful thing that had ever happened. Mr. Carpenter started to walk up and down, nodding his head, sucking his lips. And Keddy, in slow, relentless sentences, added touches to the picture.

Easily enough they came. There, with the lawyers, sat Bobby, scheming lies with delight, while all the outside-world cried out upon his sins. And, though his case hung on it, he would not have Keddy called. Remember what he looked like in the witness-box, when the balance of luck was against him, and one hope remained, and his face was hard, and his eyes brazen. Yet he would not have Keddy called. That note to his mother in Ebury Street—what was that but a trick to get Keddy out of court lest the judge should ask for him?

'H'm !' said Mr. Carpenter, as he walked to and fro and the news sank in.

Then all the wonder of the deed struck Keddy afresh, and in the atmosphere of St. Saviour's House, amid the photographs of the ninety-and-nine just persons, for the moment, his heart was bitter.

'Oh, Bobby hasn't done many things to be proud of,' he said swiftly. 'Only this one, against all his beastliness, only chucked away his case and his money and his chance of living in London decently, because he wouldn't have me spattered with the mud he was kicking up. That was all. Oh, it hardly takes a dozen words to tell all the good Bobby has ever done.'

Mr. Carpenter came close, and took possession of his hand.

'The rich men were casting their gifts into the treasury, Malcolm. And there came a certain poor widow and cast therein two mites.'

Keddy was not ungrateful. He made no effort to release his hand.

'I was dining with him that very night,' he said thickly; 'and I never knew.'

'Dear old boy, we mustn't forget that any honourable man would have done the same. But we know what it must have cost him, Malcolm. It was only two mites, but it was—what shall we say?—more than they all. Dear old boy, I'm so glad about it—so glad.'

Keddy was nervous about his train. He picked up the big woolly overcoat and struggled into it.

'I'm going up to town to see him,' he said.

His blood did not often run hot. But it ran hot now. And his spiritual adviser had no reproof for him.

'I think Bobby deserves that,' he said, smiling.

'Lend me some money,' said Keddy. 'I've only a few coppers and a cheque.'

Mr. Carpenter held out some gold. Keddy took it, and watched it as it lay in his hand. Then the money, with his hands, went into his trouser pockets. His figure was braced, his eyes brightened, and his gaze at Mr. Carpenter was little short of pugnacious.

‘Who was right? Was Arthur right, or was I?’ he asked, with the exultation throbbing in his tones. ‘I told you there were two Bobbies, and one of them was a wild beast, because they treated him like it. They pummelled him and punished him, and drew their skirts away from him, and so we had the Oakes woman and the war in the college and the lying in court. And then, just because I treated him like a human being, just because I drank his whisky and rode with him and laughed at him, he turns round and does—this. I tell you what it is: I’m glad—I’m glad about it; I am glad about the whole thing—about Wytham and the Oakes woman and the trial and the lies, and I don’t care—not two straws—what anyone says about them. If it hadn’t been for those things, we should never have had this. And this is worth everything under the sun. It makes up for everything. It’s ripping, it’s beautiful. It makes you feel—oh, Tsar of All the Russias!’

Mr. Carpenter patted his arm.

‘Dear old boy, dear old boy! we must have a great many long talks about it.’

‘I shall talk about it as long as I live,’ said Keddy.

He might have missed his train after all had not Mr. Carpenter packed him off.

## CHAPTER XX

### AN ABSURD COMPARISON

It needed but a few moments, a little blundering talk in recognition of events, and Keddy had run the full cycle from the night when the wise man measured out his warnings to the boy who had never been to school. From a sheltered home, from guarded seclusion, untried and little cautious, he had ridden one day's ride into the world. And for better or worse, scarred, defiled, or otherwise, he had ended the first day which would never come again.

The curtain fell, but not on a very brilliant scene. Keddy and Bobby were not clever at shedding brilliance on this kind of scene. It was in the back room of the house in Abingdon Villas, where Mrs. Wilton lived with her slender jointure and her son's small salary. Keddy waited there. He was waiting at half-past six, still tingling with the wonderful piece of knowledge that abased and exalted him by turns. One moment, and such was his elation that he faced Mr. Carpenter with a grin and a sparkling eye; another moment, and he could hardly walk past the porters at Paddington for distress and shame. The room where he waited, call it what you will, was the sitting-room of Bobby, the merchant's clerk. The maid had just lighted a fire. The furniture, thank goodness, was hired with the house, and Bobby was not responsible for the round table on one leg, or the malicious armchairs, on whose black glossy surface you slid three inches to discomfort the moment you sat down. The gas in the middle was hissing in its globe. There were dreary old volumes of

*Harper's Magazine*, an endless row of them, and three gilt-edged engravings of places in the Isle of Man that were dusty underneath their glass. It seemed as if Bobby had done nothing to make this room his own. Yet here in the evenings he must sit, whose room at Oxford had been so jolly, whose native place was in the oak-scented air of the house in Somerset. It did not make for the facility of what Keddy came to say and do that he should recognize this cheerless, unfamiliar place as part of the price that had been paid on his behalf, that he might go clean before God and man. But Bobby was coming, and Bobby was all that mattered. One's self-esteem can hardly sink lower than when the very contemptibleness of one's own figure is seen to be unimportant.

As on six days out of seven, the latchkey clicked in the door. Bobby never came back from the city in too good a temper. He came at a crowded time of day by the District Railway to the station at the High Street Kensington. He came from the office where there were clerks whose ways were not his ways. And they knew too much of his past. They would call him 'Sir Robert,' not always very far behind his back, and not too kindly. The head of the firm made a pet of him; his own manners were never in any high degree conciliatory; neither of these facts made much for his general popularity. So the mood of the city clerk was short and raw at this hour of the evening. And he saw, all in the wrap of one grey overcoat, Oxford—the place about which one remembers, not the troubles, but the pleasures, the friendship, the prosperity and charm.

'Keddy, man alive, what are you doing here?'

The sooner done the better. It did not help the position much that Keddy should admit, as he readily did, that this was the day for going up to Oxford, that he had been up, and then came off to London by the three-fifty. It sounded odd, as Keddy was aware.

'What a funny thing to do!' Bobby exclaimed. 'But damn it, I'm jolly glad you did! How long are you staying?'

'I thought we'd go and have a buffy dinner somewhere,' said Keddy in tones that were far from festive. 'Can you give me a bed?'

'Of course. Have you a bag?'

'No, I forgot that,' he confessed.

The curtain was not falling on a well managed scene. It was growing absurd. Keddy kicked his toe at the carpet, and watched it grimly. Then he called up his rich stock of sulkiness, and therewith he told his news.

Such occasions happen best by the green banks of the Isis, hidden in the sweeping trees, or by moonlight with the lion fountains spouting silver streaks, and the front of Orchard Wilton towering behind them. As it was, it had to happen in the incommodious back parlour in Abingdon Villas. Considering the gross inefficiency of those who conducted it, the place was no better than they deserved.

'What the devil do you mean by buying secrets from my legal advisers?' Bobby asked, with a suspicious vehemence of indignation.

Keddy kicked the carpet.

'Look here, Bobby——' he began.

'No! Damn your impudence! I won't stand it.'

And Bobby's wrath blazed finely as he strode over to a cupboard and brought out, as though it had been Oxford, whisky and a syphon. He banged the glasses down on the table.

'Drink,' he commanded.

You would have thought that Keddy was the sentimentalist, not Bobby. It was deceptive, the truth being that Keddy went for his sentiment sternly, to get it done. Bobby had a way that was longer, and more luxurious. At present he was finely indignant.

'Look here, if you won't let me say what I want to say,' Keddy broke in, 'I'll go straight back to Oxford and write you a letter!'

'And what is it,' said Bobby, coming up.

It was something that came out recklessly, wrathful, and accusing.

'Oh, what do you *think* it is? Oh, Lord, what do you

expect a man to do to you ? You go about all over the place kicking up a hell of a row to make everyone believe you're the biggest blackguard ever born, and then all of a sudden you turn round and do—damn it—the finest thing I ever—— Oh, what the devil do you mean by it ?'

His ferocious glare continued after the words ceased, and Bobby appeared to be turning something over in his mind. Slowly he poured out whisky into the glasses.

It was well for Keddy to remain ferocious. Ferocity was the only possible alternative to something quite idiotic. For now that Bobby came into the picture in flesh and blood, bringing out drinks from his dingy little cupboard below the volumes of *Harper's Magazine*, in the dreary room that was his home, in the clothes of his daily labour, and bearing thus continuously the steady lashes of the vengeance of his foes, Keddy's own share in the matter became an ill possession. Even ferocity was not kept up for long.

'Bobby,' he said, low and painfully, as the whole story took a physical setting, 'Bobby, she got you down ; she tripped you up because you turned round to save me. Oh, Lord !'

It was precisely that statement which he had wished to make. After it he felt better. And Bobby took it well, while he measured out the whisky with unwonted exactitude.

'After all, you know, one does owe something to the fellow who makes one's life worth living.'

Therefore, having said about all that was immediately desirable, they found themselves soon talking about where they would dine, and congratulating themselves on the accident of proportions which enabled Keddy to wear a suit of Bobby's evening clothes without putting their partnership to public shame.

A number of little things sent up the level of one's spirits. In the bedroom, hot water and a change of clothes cleared off a good deal of what made Bobby strange and distressing. And there was a ring in his voice, a look in his eyes, that warmed one's blood. To get away from Abingdon Villas was a further point. To



rattle down Knightsbridge in a cab was the beginning of exhilaration. In the big room at the Savoy, with the lights and the people and the music, and all that makes glad the heart of man—well, by this time, their progress was a triumph. A restaurant at eight o'clock is not a place in which things wear their tragic aspect. The room was full, and that was good. It was good that the band were playing an exciting waltz. It was good that the lights were many and the women in dresses that satisfied one's eyes. Yes, look at him, look at him, thought Keddy as the stir and the pride ran over him; he is the handsomest fellow here—I expect you can see that—but you don't know that he let them walk over his body for my sake.

Very soon, across the table where they sat, the old phenomena of Orchard Wilton pressed in through his eyes and ears, and ran with the good wine in his blood. He saw that Bobby was once more enjoying all the world at leisure. Between the courses Bobby leant back; he talked, and you could see him rolling the flavour of the topic; he listened, and his eyes were on Keddy's face, soft and steady with content. He looked away over the big room to the lights and the women, and the topic changed. Everything was slow, luxurious, unhurried, and its flavour was not missed.

So they talked. And in time, after the departure of the mother, daughter, and fiancé, whose presence at the next table had provided the necessary humorous element, after they had planned a week-end visit of Bobby to Oxford ten days hence, with a return to horses and life for one brief interval, after they had given the failing health of Sir Francis three possible more years to finish failing, when the colours of life were shining at their brightest and the spirits of youth were buoyant, they came to talk of things that were relevant.

Of Arthur.

Keddy's face darkened. But Bobby lay back and twirled his glass.

'Oh, you must get things all right with Arthur,' he said. 'You know, I've a special idea of you, and you've jolly

well got to live up to it. It's all right for me to smash people's faces in ; but for you, we can't have you doing anything except call them stupid. So you can call Arthur stupid, and then go and get drunk with him. You see ?'

Of Carpenter, too.

Bobby leant forward, and drifted from amusement into seriousness, not an unsuitable way of treating Mr. Carpenter.

'Pon my word, though, poor old Dr. Sacheverell ! I never thought we should be talking about him like this when I first saw him flapping his coat-tails down the street at Eton with the hero of the last big row ! I expect I gave him a pretty insolent stare then.'

'I expect you did,' said Keddy with some pleasure.

Bobby skinned a banana slowly and enjoyably.

'It's a funny thing about Carpenter,' he said. 'He never tells you you're a swine ; but, by Jove, he makes you feel one. Now there's Arthur ; he's always calling you a swine, and he only makes you feel that he's one. Carpenter's damned curious. The other day at Godalming I saw him coming down the garden path, and I jolly nearly cut and ran for it. But I didn't. And when he'd talked to me about the rain gauge for three minutes I felt like——'

'Like Adam when he met God in that other garden,' Keddy suggested irreverently.

'Yes, rather like that. Carpenter turns you inside out. You don't like it, and yet, by Jove, in a way you rather do. I don't know how he does it.'

'He's just a Christian,' said Keddy apologetically.

'He's a damned good fellow,' Bobby answered.

Thus of Carpenter, and then of things still nearer to the point. In fact—of the point itself.

Bobby's cigar was half smoked. The liqueur glasses were empty, and mere toys for one's fingers. Keddy had reached his second cigarette. Their arms were on the table, and their voices were low.

'My dear Keddy, do look at it sensibly.'

Bobby was enjoying each slow word as he said it.

'You see, I had taken you out to Angel Square, and I knew you didn't like it. Then there was Wytham, and that bored you still more. I knew you wouldn't enjoy telling all those lies. Besides, down at Orchard Wilton I got a sort of idea about you. Some things fit in with my idea of you, you see, and some things don't. I was quite sure that damned witness-box wasn't the place for you any more than Angel Square was. So I told Lane I'd be shot if I'd have it. That's one way of looking at it, you see.

'And there's another way. I didn't have such a particularly jolly time at Oxford. The only thing I cared much about was you. And it would have been a poor way of paying you back to stick you up in that witness-box when I knew how much it would bore you. You see, I didn't care a damn about the other swine. I hated them, and they hated me, Curly and Arthur and Porker and the whole bally lot of them, and they always went for me every time they got a chance. But you didn't. No matter what I did, and sometimes I'm pretty sure I did things simply for the pleasure of knowing you wouldn't chuck me for it. All the others were cursing me and talking about me, and staring at me as I went across the quad, and wrecking my room, and all that, and you were the only fellow who didn't do it. I'm sure I don't know why; but you didn't. You dined with me that night after the row on the river, though you were damned sick about it. Now that sort of thing puzzles me. I don't see why you did it.'

'Oh,' said Keddy promptly, 'it was because you had such a jolly way of sitting on a horse.'

Thus did he protest against excess of sentiment, with a solemn stare of eyes into eyes. But he did not succeed. Bobby was thoughtful, and would not be put off by flippancy.

'I certainly did things that were pretty thick,' he said moodily. And Keddy was constrained to yield to sentiment for a moment.

'You were no end of a scoundrel, Bobby. But you were jolly enough to me. And I liked that.'

But Bobby's eyes were still turned moodily upon his life at Oxford.

'It's rather like the dead dog,' he said.

'Like what?'

Did he not know the story? Then Bobby would tell him. And he leant luxuriously forward, twirled the little liqueur glass, and blew out a long shaft of smoke.

'Don't you know it? Oh, it's a good story. It comes from somewhere. I don't know where. All the disciples were walking about with Jesus somewhere or other, and they found a dead dog, *very* dead, I suppose. And they all stood round and enjoyed themselves pointing out exactly *how* disgusting it was. Its eyes like jelly, I suppose, and half of it gone putrid, and vermin running about it, and the stink, and the Lord knows what! They all stood curling their lips at it, and running over its beastly points. Jesus didn't say anything. And when they had all quite finished, He said: "Pearls are not equal to the whiteness of his teeth."'

The story ended, but with his eyes curiously light and unflinching Bobby still held Keddy to its meaning. And this, in Bobby, was of course an outrage. There was no one else who would have done it; there was no one else who in hatred and in affection never quite knew where to draw the line. It was absurd to tell that story. But told in Bobby's way it was outrageous, it was excessive, it was indecent.

The room was less crowded now. The music had stopped. But there were people round who might have wondered, had they cared, what could be the communication the handsome boy was making that affected his friend so strangely.

Keddy's face tightened. He sat further back in his chair, slowly and uncomfortably.

'There,' said Bobby, 'you have it all. The putrid carcase of an Oxford fellow, stinking and rotting—the scornful, disgusted Arthurs and Porkers and grandfathers—and—well, Keddy, then you came.'

There the comparison broke down. But the hint of appeal, of apology, came too late. Keddy looked down.

Round his eyes, up to his temples, the light flush gathered and spread. He tried to drain another drop from his empty liqueur glass. And then the blush was crimson and burning, and the embarrassment not to be borne.

He pushed back his chair.

'Come on, Bobby, let's go.'

THE END

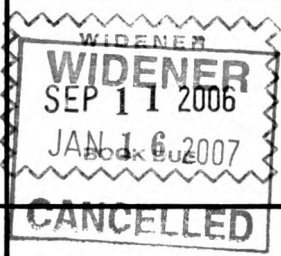




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